

Rethinking the Fifth Empire: António Vieira and the *Clavis Prophetarum*¹

Maria Ana T. Valdez²

Abstract

It is this paper's purpose to introduce António Vieira's model of the Fifth Empire and to contextualize it within the biblical exegesis tendencies of his time. Vieira's conceptualization is of utmost importance for understanding the intellectual and religious environment of seventeenth-century Portugal: a disturbed time, during which people searched for answers in biblical prophecies to explain the reasons behind so much suffering. Vieira's systematization, however, was first viewed as a possible heresy by the Portuguese Inquisition and was only later, and in part, rehabilitated by Antonio Casnedi. The *Clavis prophetarum* is also an expression of an eschatological hope common to the Iberian world, although it focuses mostly on Portugal.

Keywords

António Vieira, *Clavis prophetarum*, Fifth Empire, Apocalyptic Literature, Portugal

Resumo

Este artigo propõe analisar e contextualizar o modelo de *Quinto Império* proposto pelo Pe. António Vieira de acordo com os modelos de exegese bíblica praticados no seu tempo. A conceptualização vieiriana é fundamental para a compreensão do ambiente intelectual e religioso do século XVII português: um período conturbado durante o qual as pessoas procuravam compreender as razões do seu sofrimento à luz de profecias bíblicas. A sistematização efectuada por António Vieira, apesar de inicialmente tida como uma possível heresia por parte da Inquisição portuguesa, foi mais tarde reabilitada pela *sententia* de Antonio Casnedi. É necessário lembrar que a *opus magnum* vieirina—*Clavis prophetarum*—é um dos melhores exemplares de literatura escatológica daquela época, e que coloca a tónica no papel a realizar por Portugal e pelo monarca português com vista ao estabelecimento do reino divino de Deus na Terra tal como prometido nos textos bíblicos. Como tal, não é de estranhar que o Papa e o Rei português sejam descritos como “vigários de Cristo na Terra.”

Palavras-chave

António Vieira, *Clavis prophetarum*, Quinto Império, Literatura Apocalíptica, Portugal

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² CHUL, University of Lisbon and Yale University, Department of Religious Studies. *E-mail* – ana.valdez@yale.edu

Many historians have devoted their life's work to the study of phenomena such as prophecy, millenarianism, and apocalypticism, and in particular to its emergence, development, and influence, as well as the reasons why at times such phenomena appear to have vanished from the collective mind. It is our belief that R. Rusconi is on the right track when he underlines the originality of Iberian intellectual movements, especially after the beginning of Maritime Expansion (Rusconi, 1999: 132).

Therefore, and risking jumping immediately to a conclusion, I have to say that it is my belief that the Iberian Peninsula, including its overseas territories, does indeed represent an original intellectual phenomenon regarding the issue of political prophecy. Vieira's work, and particularly the *Clavis prophetarum*, represents a major contribution to the reinterpretation of a biblical concept used not only by the Church, but also by the broader community of Christians, as if it held the key to the promised kingdom of God.

It is, nonetheless, necessary to remember that Vieira is not introducing a new subject at all. He is reinterpreting, according to his own beliefs and agenda, the theory regarding the end of time and the consequent achievement of the eschatological kingdom as it was first introduced by Daniel and later developed by the Christian author of the Book of Revelation. Moreover, because the achievement of the kingdom of God was so important for Christians, many theologians over the centuries attempted to interpret these texts in a way that would permit them to tell their communities how close, or not, they were to the end of the world, and, consequently, to the new beginning. Authors such as Josephus, Jerome, Hippolytus, Augustine, and Fiore, among many others, should be counted among these theologians.

a) *Daniel*

In the Book of Daniel (c. 2nd century bce), we find two different accounts of historical periodization based on the scheme of four succeeding empires. The first is found in Chapter 2 in the description of Nebuchadnezzar's dream, while the second account, in Chapters 7-8, is concerned with the description of the four beasts, and, in particular, with the depiction of the last two periods of the four-age schema, using the images of the ram and the he-goat.

The first account of the theory of the four empires in the Book of Daniel is considered by scholars as the introductory chapter to the visions of the apocalyptic section. For example, regarding this issue, Hartman writes that: "(...) once independent stories that

the compiler of the Book of Daniel prefixed to his apocalyptic visions are made up of a theme within a theme” (Hartman and Di Lella, 1978: 142).

It is only during the second part of this tale that the scheme of the four kingdoms is introduced. In accordance with the revelation that Daniel received in a night vision following previous prayers to the God of Israel, he told the king that he (the king) had seen an enormous and frightening statue. This statue was composed of different materials: the head was gold, the chest and arms were silver, the middle and the thighs were bronze, the legs were iron, and the feet a mixture of clay and iron. The king then saw how a stone had destroyed the entire statue, first hitting the feet. Afterwards, the same stone became a great mountain and filled the entire world. Following this description of the dream, Daniel explains its meaning to the king. First, he notes that Nebuchadnezzar was king because he had been chosen by Yahweh (Daniel, 2:37). He explains after this that the different materials represented successive empires, the golden one (the Babylonian Empire) being the first. At the same time, he describes how Babylon and Nebuchadnezzar’s successors were condemned to be defeated and how their supremacy would be destroyed in the future. Empires were predestined for destruction until the appearance of the “feet,” a mixture of clay and iron that represented the weakness of that last kingdom. From this last and weak kingdom however, a stronger one would rise up in the future. This kingdom was predicted to last forever and to be indestructible by the will of God, the same god who had given the dream to Nebuchadnezzar.

The succession of empires forecast in this dream can also be interpreted in the light of historical events (Rowley, 1959: 161-73). It is common to read into this description the succession of empires in the Ancient Near East down to the 2nd century bce. According to this theory, the golden head would represent Babylon, the silver arms and chest, Media, the bronze middle and thighs, Persia, and the iron legs, Greece.³ Although scholars take the mixture of clay and iron portrayed in the statue’s feet to refer to the division of Alexander’s empire after his death, most would agree that the iron mixed with clay refers to the policy of intermarriage existing between Ptolemies and Seleucids. Moreover, from the point of view of Jewish resistance during the reign of Antiochus IV, the stone was also understood by the text’s editor to represent the eschatological Jewish kingdom still to come.

The future would cause this schema to be continuously reinterpreted. From the 1st century CE onwards, the emphasis of the interpretation was placed on Rome instead of

³ Although Josephus points to Rome as the last empire, the chronology of the book does not permit us to reach such a conclusion.

Greece. In accordance with this subsequent interpretation, the sequence of empires would be Assyria, Media and Persia (understood as part of the same unity), Greece, and, finally, Rome as the last empire.

The text of Daniel, Chapter 2, does not, however, specify the names of the empires, thus allowing for the theory of the four-kingdom scheme to be widely applied in the future when many reinterpretations were to follow. In fact, it seems more plausible that the sequence of empires represented in Daniel would have been one of Iranian origin, which was well known in the Near East and obviously did not contain references to Rome or Greece (Collins, 1984: 280-94).

The author of this text was interested in history only when it served his own interests. In a word, history was significant insofar as it accentuated the importance of the Jewish people and their religion – that aside, the events that were reported could be mere fiction. Therefore, the different empires were depicted in accordance with their relationship with Israel, which may explain the correlation with the different metals and their inherent quality. In reality, this review of world history suggests to the reader a vision of a declining world about to reach its end.

Daniel, Chapter 7, marks the beginning of the apocalyptic section of the Book of Daniel and occupies what J. Collins calls a “*pivotal place*” because it links the two parts of the book (Collins, 1984: 277). We find once more in this chapter a dream/vision concerning the four kingdoms, though this time represented by four beasts that came from the sea.⁴ This new section of the book, however, makes explicit mention of some current historical events, and therefore the context of the two texts is different.

To conclude, the motifs in Chapter 7 are comparable to the ones described in Chapter 2, especially those relating to the progress of historical time. In the first account, History was described as a human statue divided into body parts composed of different materials, which were destined to succeed each other until the complete destruction of the statue was achieved; in the second account, time is compared to a succession of four empires. In truth, the two stories describe the same division of time into four smaller units followed by an additional one of eschatological characteristics. In addition, some authors recall that the statue’s toes in Chapter 2 can be taken as a parallel to the tenth horn mentioned in Chapter 7. The two images are destined to be destroyed and replaced at a

⁴ The motif of the sea monsters is a common theme in the Ancient Near East, representing a threat to the instituted power. Probably the best known texts outside the Bible are the Ugarit myths, in which Yamm (the sea) tries to defeat Baal. In the biblical texts, we have some references to Leviathan, who is continuously defeated by Yahweh.

later date. These two entities, the stone and the horn, would then be the last to reign before the establishment of the divine kingship of God on earth, which would make them surpass all previous rulers in power. Simultaneously, the last beast, or the last period of time, should be understood as representing the climax of the opposition to the chosen people.

Probably one of the most important features of this book is the fact that its author made the first real attempt to date the precise time of the end of the world. In fact, when reading the end of Chapter 12, one is informed that the events described as anticipating the end would last for 1290 days (Daniel, 12:11) or 1335 days (Daniel, 12:12). As said in the text, this is the period “From the time that the daily sacrifice shall be taken away and the abomination that maketh desolate set up” (Daniel, 12:11). Therefore, the intention of the author is clear. By setting the limits of this distressing period, he is, at the same time, explaining that its end has already been predefined in chronological terms by God. At the same time, Daniel’s author is also “opening the doors” to a possible future resurrection when he writes that “Many of them that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt” (Daniel, 12:2).⁵ The latter passage gave rise to different interpretations by subsequent interpreters. Some ancient authors like Porphyry and Jerome still regarded it as a metaphor intended to describe some sort of military reaction, as had happened during the Maccabean revolt. Most scholars today view it differently, however. In fact, it is commonly accepted that, in this passage, “(...) Daniel is referring to the actual resurrection of individuals from the dead, because of the explicit language of everlasting life” (Collins, 1993: 392). Nevertheless, we can say that the author of Daniel envisages two different temporal stages: one in this world and another in the world to come, characterized by eternity. In fact, it is at this precise point that the author introduces the concept of the reward of an afterlife. What may be discussed is whether this resurrection was to be a bodily one, especially because there is no explicit reference to the nature of such resurrection in Daniel (Nickelsburg, 1972: 301). Daniel’s author envisages resurrection to be partial, i.e. reserved only for some, which thus transforms “resurrection” into a process of special selection. In this particular case, it is reserved for the faithful and for the wise (the *maskilim*) as a reward for their deeds and endurance during such a disturbed period. On the other hand, those not favored by it will

⁵ Before Daniel, the common view of death in Israel was that the dead would live a shadowy life in Sheol, a place renowned, for example, for not allowing people even to pray to God. The only known exceptions of people who had not been sent to Sheol after dying were Enoch and Elijah, who had exceptionally been taken to God. In fact, not even the description of the valley of dry bones in Ezekiel, 37, or the sense of restoration expressed in Hosea, 6:2, are taken as implicitly describing a possible afterlife. Therefore, Daniel’s text marks

awake “to shame and everlasting contempt” (Daniel, 12:2). Hence, this reward of an afterlife was reserved for those who had remained steadfast and faithful during the distressing events reported in the book.

b) Revelation

As Yarbrow Collins writes, “the primary purpose of the book is not to impart information” (Collins, 1984: 144). In fact, the author of Revelation appeared to be far more interested in explaining to his companions why they needed to commit and be faithful to God if they wanted to achieve their final goal than he is in explaining anything else. Hence, the perspective of history that is expressed in this text is that of the Christian people, and does not correspond to a universal view. At the same time, John refers to the existence of a messianic kingdom expected to last for a thousand years (Revelation, 20:4), and his words allow us to accept that, for him, that period has already begun. Therefore, the present corresponds to the time before the messianic kingdom, while the judgment and the establishment of the divine kingdom represent the future.

It is necessary to realize that this author had a certain historical sense, even if he did not express it as clearly as Daniel or 1 Enoch did. In fact, there is a gap between his time and the time to come that permits us to identify this messianic kingdom with an intermediate period, one that would terminate with the judgment of the dead. Although these 1000 years represent a limited period, their importance lies in the symbolism of the figure rather than the period of a thousand years itself. Another aspect to be considered when analyzing the different ways of mentioning and understanding time used by this author is the fact that he also describes a sequence of rulers: in this particular case, we have a sequence of Roman emperors (Revelation, 17:9). This may, however, be considered as a chronology rather than a philosophy of history. The sequence of chronological events reported by John also implies the question of the antichrist, and it is in this perspective that the references to Nero and Babylon are sometimes understood, especially when commentators analyze the symbolism of the number achieved by the sum of the letters of the emperor’s name. The express reference to the existence of an antithetic character opposing that of the Messiah in a time considered to be intermediate represents the

an important change in attitude and perspective regarding death, although he was not the first to mention the existence of a judgment of the dead. This matter is found mainly in 1 Enoch, 22.

beginning of the ancient question regarding the identity of the antichrist: a king, a pope, or someone else? Likewise the cities: Babylon and/or Rome versus the New Jerusalem.

In Revelation, the author attempted to expound a theory that divided time into two different ages (one in the past and one in the future), to which he added an intermediate period representing the present. The result is a universal history of the cosmos, not just a portrait of a small unit of time and/or space. This happens not only in the case of the messianic kingdom, but also with the description of the sequence of kings, where we find a clear distinction of the three periods (the past kings, the king that is, and the one that has yet to come). We do know that Chapters 20 and 21 translate a view of the future world and of the world that would anticipate the Last Judgment. Furthermore, there is an explicit account of the existence of two distinct deaths at two different moments in time (cf. Revelation, 20:5, and Revelation, 21:8), which is different from the one that we normally read in earlier apocalyptic texts. For example, in Daniel, we have an account of the judgment, where it is said that the people whose names were inscribed in the Book of Life would be raised, but there is no explanation regarding what is supposed to happen to the remainder. In Revelation, we have at first two different groups of people: one with the mark of the Lamb and the other with the mark of the Beast. The first ones are entitled to live in the earthly kingdom of God that is going to be created after the thousand-year period—the New Jerusalem—while the others would suffer a second death and be thrown into the lake of fire, where they would join the Dragon, the False Prophet, and Satan. In a certain way, Revelation is more detailed and explicit than previous texts, thus expressing the increasing power of imagery in the mind of Christians.

From the millennial period described in Revelation, 20:1-6, during which the Dragon was supposed to be imprisoned (albeit to be released later), we move to the final battle described in Revelation, 20:7-10, when the Dragon was to be released and would gather an army, to later be defeated and thrown into the lake of sulphur. Finally, there is an account of the last judgment in Revelation, 20:11-15. Everyone whose name was not inscribed in the Book of Life would also be thrown into the lake of fire, and this judgment was meant to be total and take place when Sea, Death, and Hades would deliver up their dead for judgment. After this, the chosen ones, i.e. the people whose names were inscribed in the Book of Life, would start enjoying this new age with the kingdom of God on Earth and a New Jerusalem without a temple. After all, being the city of the living God is in itself equivalent to being a living temple, so there was no need to build another one.

This was the New Age, and although it implied a formal cut with the past, or the old age, it was not a complete cut. In short, Revelation does not contain many explicit details about what is supposed to happen to the world or when, but it offers the listener a reasonable idea of how some events were supposed to take place during the intermediate period. Again, the author manipulates the existing tension between Christians and Romans, and even Jews, in order to achieve a level of anguish in which he could more easily explain that what was happening was the result of a divine plan, something predetermined by God, and that the reestablishment of the kingdom of God in the very near future was also a reality. He confirms this by saying in the last verses: "And, behold, I come quickly; and my reward is with me, to give every man according as his work shall be. I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end, the first and the last" (Revelation, 22:12-13), substantiating the sense of totality and ensuring that everything that was happening was part of a divine plan, especially History.

c) *António Vieira*

Raymond Cantel, the scholar who devoted his life to the study of Vieira's prophetic and messianic tendencies, confirms L. de Azevedo's theory that the time of the Portuguese Restoration, i.e., the period around 1640, was the key moment for Vieira's public introduction of his eschatological system (Cantel, 1960: 44-45). Going further, Cantel mentions how Vieira was truly persuaded that Bandarra's *Trovas* were, in fact, a divinely inspired text, as some of his forecasts appeared to be taking place (Cantel, 1960: 45).

Although we cannot discuss here in detail the different theories about when it was that Vieira first started thinking in eschatological terms, we must say that, when Vieira began speaking of a theory of the *Fifth Empire*, he was creating a peculiar, specific, and original system of thought. This system—a system indeed, no fear to call it that—is perfectly coherent and follows the logic of his time (Cantel, 1960: 45). The originality of such a model is not only based on the aspirations of his century. Vieira goes further and does, in fact, create a new model based on the traditional system of the ages of the world and of the succession of empires described by Daniel and Revelation.

It thus appears possible to accept that, for Vieira, this systematization became his life's purpose. Yet we have to agree that the author envisaged that his broader work/system should be known at many different levels. For that reason, we would say, he first wrote a

personal letter, then a work in Portuguese addressed to the Portuguese, where we notice a sort of panegyric of the Portuguese people, and finally a work in Latin destined to disclose his theories to the Roman men of culture of his time. It is as if Vieira had planned a crescendo of revelation of his own ideas, parallel to his awareness that the Portuguese people needed to be warned about their contents. Only in that way could his project be fully completed. We speak of a project, but what Vieira had in mind, particularly in the *Clavis prophetarum*, was certainly the realization of a divine plan, in which Portugal and its king would play a key role in the establishment of the divine kingdom prophesized since the time of the Old Testament, and also one that the New Testament and the Church Fathers continued to follow.

As was current practice at that time, the Inquisition examined Vieira's manuscript of the *Clavis prophetarum*. Fr Casnedi, however, wrote in his counter-evaluation that Vieira's treatise consisted of three books (Azevedo, 1931, vol. II: 375).⁶ Book I was devoted to the nature and quality of the Kingdom of God consummated on earth; Book II was dedicated to its earthly consummation; and Book III was about the time when these events should take place and for how long they would last. Casnedi denies any possibility of moral imperfection in Vieira's book. While underlining the physical imperfection of the manuscript, he mentions that it was not clear whether this had been caused by the author, who did not finish his work (Azevedo, 1931, vol. II: 375), or if it had been caused by the copying and transmission processes.

Concerning Book I, Casnedi describes it as perfect. It contained eleven booklets divided into twelve chapters. Casnedi describes it in the following words: "he admirável, erudito e rasoavel" [it is admirable, erudite and reasonable] (Azevedo, 1931, vol. II: 378). Books II and III appear to be the more problematic ones for Casnedi. Book II deals with the consummation of the kingdom on earth and is described as imperfect and incomplete. Fr Casnedi also mentions the famous section of the *Clavis* in which Vieira digresses about the conversion of the Jews and resuming the sacrifices of the ancient law in the temple. L. de Azevedo, however, says in a footnote, that the manuscript he used ignored that particular section where the temple of Ezekiel was mentioned, thus allowing us to question whether this section belonged to this particular booklet of the *Clavis* (Azevedo, 1931, vol. II: 384, n. 1). Vieira's argument is related to the need to resume the ancient law to accomplish the fulfillment of the vision of Ezekiel. Therefore, the sacrifices that had once

⁶"As the Author says at the beginning of his work". In Azevedo, J. L. d. (1931). *História de António Vieira*. 2nd ed. Lisbon: A. M. Teixeira.

been established by God, which explained why the Jews could not be called idolaters, should be resumed for the benefit of the Universal Church.

All taken together, it is apparent that the only part of Vieira's work that may have posed more problems for Casnedi was the latter part, since the remaining parts appeared to him "perfect and in accordance with the laws of the Church," as mentioned above.

The first problem Vieira faced concerned whether or not it was legitimate to wonder about the future, especially given Christ's sentence in Acts, 1:7. According to Vieira, this would have determined the path of several of the most important names in the history of the Church, such as Cyril of Jerusalem and St. Augustine. In fact, these authors underlined that only God could know the future, consequently creating a distinction between God's power and that of Christ. Besides, Vieira recalls that not even the sacred texts could verify beyond doubt all the forecast events, thus allowing for their authority to be questioned. At the same time, Vieira writes that if such important names⁷ were not able to find a reliable interpretation of the information provided by the sacred texts, not even deciding about the age of the world, then how could they possibly know when those same events would take place? Moreover, he says, most of the temporal references found in the Bible are not to be taken literally,⁸ which in the final analysis represents an *a priori* reason preventing us from finding any real dates within the biblical texts.

Nevertheless, and although Vieira confirms all this, he has a different opinion regarding the possibility of knowing the future in advance, which he explains through the existing distinction between revealed events and revelation in itself, i.e., between the thing and its essence. Therefore, he warns us that not always are either the revelation of the event or its timing clear in the message, and that, at other times, part of the information is not given. Consequently, it is impossible to determine with any great precision when was the moment mentioned in those revelations, or even the complete meaning of what had been revealed to the seer. Nonetheless, Vieira emphasizes that, when time and event are revealed, it is as justifiable as it will ever be to search for the knowledge relating to the actual date in which those same events would take place. This could be done, according to Vieira, in texts such as Daniel and Revelation, where days could mean years, as already mentioned by Augustine and Theodoret of Cyrillus. Besides, when time was not revealed

⁷As an example, Vieira cites names such as Josephus, Philo, Clement of Alexandria, Origen, Eusebius of Caesarea, Cyprian, Jerome, Augustine, Orosius, Cassiodorus, Isidore of Seville, and Beda, among others. (cf. Vieira, A. (2000). *Clavis prophetarum = Chave dos profetas*. 1st ed. Lisbon: Biblioteca Nacional.).

⁸Cf. the ongoing discussion about the symbolism of time in Yarbro Collins, A. (1996). *Cosmology and Eschatology in Jewish and Christian Apocalypticism*. Leiden/New York: E.J. Brill, where the author discusses at length the meaning and value of each word, and its eventual significance.

and could not be understood except through the interpretation of signs and circumstances, this should also be analyzed. Moreover, an attempt to establish the moment of the predicted events should be pursued. Vieira, as usual, goes further than this and writes:

(...) sed diserte pronuntiat a Deo sciri non posse, adhuc licet de eodem tempore conijcere ac disputare et quod probabile videatur, non quidem praecise ac definite sed indeterminate asserere. (Vieira, 2000: 50)⁹

Furthermore, Vieira mentions that it was Christ who wanted humankind to search for the date of the end of the world, at least to determine whether it was close to the present or not. This appears to be a controversial affirmation unless one remembers the existence of several signs concerning the end of time, with the specific purpose of reminding us how close the end was and how the faithful should get ready. Clear examples of this can be found, once again, in Daniel and Revelation. Albeit with the purpose of justifying his affirmations, Vieira cites the names of those, such as Justin Martyr, Irenaeus, Jerome, Isidore of Seville, the Cardinal of Cuse, Pico della Mirandola and Cornelius, who in the past followed similar paths to the one that he was about to take.¹⁰ In this manner, ancient authorities and their works became the models followed by Vieira in the *Clavis*.

The path suggested by Vieira does, in part, contradict the one that is normally pursued, i.e., he foresees a line of explanation based on an interpretation of the present with a view to the future, and not the common interpretation of the present based on the past. This interpretational shift was, according to Vieira, needed in order to accurately define the time of the kingdom of Christ and of the universal conversion to Christianity.

Vieira was preparing to demonstrate how evangelization was closely linked to the knowledge of the size of the world and to the resources made available to preachers and missionaries in order to reach such goals in those lost corners of the world. Based on this distinction, Vieira demonstrated the key role played by the Portuguese. Defining the limits of the known world, with which Vieira begins his exposition, was the only possible way to solve the problem concerning the supposedly universal preaching of the Gospel in the past by the Apostles.

⁹“(…) when a future event is revealed and not only the time is omitted, but yet God proclaims loudly that it is not possible to know it, even though it is acceptable, concerning that same time, to conjecture, dispute and affirm what appears to be probable, not with precision and in a definite way, but in an indeterminate fashion.”

¹⁰ Each time Vieira cites *authorities*, we can question whether he does so only with the purpose of showing how others have already used the same arguments, or if he really is attempting to protect himself from an eventual condemnation by the Inquisition.

Another subject that Vieira deals with concerns the Lost Tribes of Israel, whose location was unknown. Besides, as he says, these peoples similarly did not possess any type of knowledge regarding Christ. They would, however, have to be found before the end, which could only take place when the entire world was known, something that was not yet a reality at the time when Vieira was writing, although rapid progress was being made.

Vieira resumes his arguments about this theme by saying that there were no people who did not believe that the Gospel was not being preached to the entire world at that moment (Vieira, 2000: 50), thus confirming how evangelization was still an ongoing reality of his time.

For universal evangelization to take place it was necessary to remember the power of the word and of the grace of performing miracles, with which God would have favored the Apostles, besides sending them the Holy Spirit. In Book III, Chapter VII, § 2, Vieira begins by listing the ones possibly chosen by God to perform such universal evangelization. The first one chosen would certainly be the *Pastor Angelicus* (Vieira, 2000: 50), i.e. the pope, who would have twelve apostles at his disposal, just as Christ had. His main task would be to reform the Church in such a way that it could regain its original splendor. This is also the way Vieira uses to introduce his readers to his theories regarding the future kingdom of Christ being consummated on earth and the time of the antichrist. The latter would be confronted by the pope and by temporal princes. To underline his argument, Vieira cites Cornelius à Lapide on how a temporal prince would play a fundamental role (Vieira, 2000: 588-590).

Vieira was explicitly emphasizing the importance of temporal power for the establishment of the divine kingdom on earth, while demonstrating that this was exactly how it had been forecast by biblical prophecies. If this did not happen, then God would question and punish those temporal princes who did not follow His orders. Therefore, Vieira joins temporal and spiritual powers together in one single and unbreakable alliance, whose main purpose is the world's subjection to Christianity and later the achievement of eternal salvation.

In Book III, Chapter VIII, §3, Vieira writes that “(...) non tamen omnes universim homines esse credituros” [not all men will believe], immediately bringing to mind his previous theories concerning the Jews and the need to make mutual concessions (Vieira, 2000: 618). To further reinforce his statement, he writes that it was not necessary for all men to believe, because there was nothing in the sacred texts that said that they would have to convert within the time of the Church. The necessary conversion could take place *a*

posteriori (Vieira, 2000: 620). By adding this to the verses of Daniel, where it is mentioned that only the chosen ones would be saved, Vieira builds a stronger argument that allows him to explain how the Jews were part of the universal and final conversion. This interplay between the present time and the one that was to come gave him what he needed to argue that the end was about to happen, although it was not yet possible to speak of a universal evangelization.

Vieira describes a time in the future without ever being precise about it in chronological terms, although he allows us to foresee that universal conversion does not have a linear interpretation, since it will also take place at different moments in time and on a different level. To a certain extent, the God who created everything would be praised by all His creatures, even after Christ ordered the Apostles to shift the evangelization efforts toward the gentiles, instead of concentrating on the Jews, the first chosen nation.

As we can see, the *Fifth Empire* described by Vieira appears to have some very particular characteristics, which were not found in earlier authors. Vieira assumes that attaining perfection is necessary in order to achieve the kingdom of God and the time of the Last Judgment, but this was a common opinion in his time. He continues to remember the narrative of Daniel, 2:31-36, where the destruction of the statue of Nebuchadnezzar's dream is described, thus implying a form of historical progress towards the time of the end of the world. Vieira identifies the destructive stone, commonly regarded as the eschatological kingdom, with the *Fifth Empire*, which was supposed to take place before the Last Judgment. Consequently, this empire represented *per se* a stage of perfection that was not only more complete than that of the Roman Empire, but which would also encompass all worldly peoples. In truth, Vieira viewed the Roman Empire as decadent, which to a certain extent is equivalent to another well-known theory of his time, and according to which the world was aging and about to collapse. Therefore, the *Fifth Empire*, as Vieira understood and described it, represented the next step in the history of the world, while it was still a natural heir to the Roman Empire (Cantel, 1960: 134).

Moreover, the *Fifth Empire* would be the result of the defeat of the Beast described in Revelation, and consequently of the millennial kingdom. However, Vieira never mentions in his writings the possible second release of the beast, its final defeat, and the 45 days that would precede the Last Judgment as described in Revelation. To some extent, Vieira's *Fifth Empire per se* represented an endless period in which Christ would reign through the pope and the emperor. This is certainly one of the major innovations proposed by Vieira for the apocalyptic scheme introduced in Revelation.

Vieira understood History as being composed of different times, which together represented a description of historical progress toward the establishment of the divine kingdom on earth. At the same time, Vieira tells his reader how he considered the present to still be a time of imperfection, and in need of improvement before the end of time could be reached. This description and interpretation of the length of time is very similar to the one introduced by Joachim of Fiore. It is, however, important to underline that such “imperfect time” runs counter to Augustine’s theories regarding the pre-existence of the *City of God* within the scope of the earthly city.

For António Vieira, the *Fifth Empire* was undoubtedly the Kingdom of Christ and of the Christians, as he frequently states in both the *História do futuro* and in the *Clavis prophetarum*. What is questionable is whether this kingdom was to be earthly or heavenly, and how necessary it was that the second coming of Christ should happen before its consummation.

Consequently, it is necessary to confirm right away that what Vieira is proposing does not follow the traditional interpretation. In fact, it appears that this fifth period is more likely to be the Millennium than the kingdom of the antichrist. One remark, however, needs to be made at this point: for his particular interpretation Vieira uses the multitude of horns with which the last monster is described in the second section of the Book of Daniel, as if they were a sign that its power would be divided up and spread among many smaller kingdoms. Although this is not entirely new, the novelty here has to do with Vieira’s identification of this last empire with Christ and not with the antichrist.

Vieira was aware that he was entering dangerous waters in which the opinion of the ancient theologians was law and where it was unsafe to propose a different reading. He does not, however, appear to have run away from his responsibilities and, as always, expounded his arguments quite convincingly. Therefore, the reader has no doubts concerning the fact that the *Fifth Empire* as elaborated by Vieira was a combination of the two types of power: spiritual power (the Church) and temporal power (the *Imperium*). The author was aware that this combination could preclude the eternity that the kingdom of God implied, since this empire as described by Vieira is similar to the intermediary period identified with the Millennium. It is not possible, however, to state whether Vieira was considering a second release of the antichrist or not, as described in Revelation, and its following decisive defeat by God, because of the unfinished character of the *Clavis*.

Vieira once again uses the text of Daniel to say that even if one should only understand the Empire of Christ and of the Christians to be earthly, then it was still

necessary to remember that “eternity” was not necessarily “duration without an end”, but should be understood as “continuity and permanence over a long period of time” (Vieira, 1992: 287). This type of phraseology appears confusing in the sense that we cannot explicitly and without doubt say that this *Fifth Empire* is limited in time, as we might have expected. According to Vieira, Christ’s power was temporal because it included power over the entire humankind, and all earthly things, similar to the one that temporal kings held over their subjects (Vieira, 1992: 300). One could not, however, forget the special character of Christ’s kingdom: one that was necessarily spiritual in nature. Consequently, it was obvious for António Vieira that this Empire would necessarily combine the two types of power in order to become universal. Christ, who had already been called a king in the past,¹¹ would resume his temporal power, while exercising his spiritual power. His kingdom, the *Fifth Empire*, would combine Christians as well as all the remaining earthly peoples, since universal evangelization would take place during two distinct moments.

It thus appears possible to confirm that this Empire would be a continuation of the Church, although its leader would change from the pope to Christ. Since Vieira never expressed the need for a second coming of Christ in order for this kingdom to begin, and even introduced the pope and the emperor as the “vicars of Christ on Earth,” it is possible to question whether he thought it necessary for there to be an actual return of Christ to Earth, or if an apparently endless Millennium would take place. For him, the antichrist, personified by the Turks (the Ottoman Empire), would be definitively defeated by the Portuguese king at sea, and there is no mention about any second release/appearance of this character. Furthermore, at this moment, it appears possible to state that the spiritual power of the Church, and later of Christ, can also be understood in the light of Augustine’s theories regarding the earthly city. One cannot, however, forget that, for Vieira, this empire was supposed to happen within history as Joachim of Fiore said.

António Vieira primarily uses Daniel to explain how the *Fifth Empire* would be established, although he mentions the text of Revelation several times. This combination of the two texts, and how he apparently reconciles them, is certainly something of which one should be aware when analyzing his work. It is clear that, when he describes the *Fifth Empire*, he says that it will be established after the defeat of the antichrist and when universal conversion is achieved (Vieira, 2000, Chapter IX, *passim*). Vieira, however, also proposes the existence of two different conversions, while saying that the *Fifth Empire* began when Christ died on the Cross. Therefore, it is difficult to confirm whether this

¹¹ Vieira recalls several times how Christ had been called “King of the Hebrews” during his lifetime.

Empire is equivalent to the Millennium described in Revelation, or if it may be of endless duration.

As Vieira begins to describe the statue of Nebuchadnezzar's dream, the reader is immediately warned that he thought the last kingdom, the fourth, to be that of the Romans (Vieira, 1992: 252). The division of the Roman Empire was based on a description of the historical and political circumstances of Vieira's own time. Therefore, it is not very difficult for a brilliant mind like that of Vieira's to use biblical prophecies to his own advantage. Thus, he begins by narrating his century's history, underlining the fratricidal nature of the power struggles between these kingdoms, and describes how these same struggles were weakening an eventual defense of Christianity against the Ottoman Empire.

After this long interlude about Vieira's conception of the *Fifth Empire*, one of the questions still to be answered relates to the time of this new kingdom. Was it to be within or beyond History? Vieira answers this question in a very clear way: the kingdom of Christ began when Christ died on the cross, and therefore it is part of History.¹² In fact, Vieira describes this *Fifth Empire*, the eschatological kingdom, to be realized on earth and to be led by the supreme earthly leaders: the pope, representing spiritual power, and the emperor, representing the temporal power over all nations.

Furthermore, if it included the pope and the emperor as its leaders, then this kingdom could not lie beyond History. We do not know, however, whether Vieira also considered this kingdom to be eternal. It appears, nevertheless, that Vieira is in a very particular way conjugating the interpretations about the nature of this kingdom of earlier exegetes such as Augustine and Joachim of Fiore. From Augustine, Vieira used this author's theories about the existence of an earthly empire of Christ, since Christ had been incarnated and represented after His death by the Church. António Vieira, however, did not support Augustine in the matter of the end of this world and the creation of another one, as the concept of the *City of God* foresaw. Instead, he followed Joachim of Fiore, and, because of that, we can say that we find traces of Joachimism in his work.

Vieira supports an earthly kingdom that would combine spiritual and temporal power, and in which the pope and the emperor would act as Christ's vicars on earth. By following such a line of thought, we can say that his theories are based on an extension of historical time, demonstrating historical continuity rather than rupture. The world would change, but, because universal evangelization had not yet been reached, it was still

¹² Cf. ANTT, *Conselho Geral do Santo Ofício*, Ms. 122, f. 129 v. and ff. (Book 1, Chapter, VI) and *História do Futuro*, Book II, Chapter II.

impossible to consider the existence of a heavenly kingdom. Moreover, Vieira's theorization is not explicit about what is to happen after the "*ultimam*" conversion takes place, except to say that the final kingdom of Christ would then be achieved.

Consequently, many questions concerning the essence of António Vieira's *Fifth Empire* remain unanswered. Future analysis of the text of the *Clavis* will certainly enable us to further confirm Vieira's originality with regard to the interpretation of the biblical concept of the *Fifth Empire*. It is, however, already clear that Vieira combined the descriptions of Daniel and of Revelation in a scheme that served the intentions of both the new Portuguese dynasty and the Portuguese Jesuits. Vieira was not casting aside his faith, to which he remained faithful until the last moment, but he certainly interpreted a religious theory according to the political demands and expectations of his century, particularly those of the Portuguese. As such, his work, and in particular the *Clavis prophetarum*, should be identified as pertaining to the literary genre of political prophecy.

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