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Job

Chapter Twenty Six:



I know that my Redeemer lives, and that
in the end he will stand upon the earth.

- Job 19:25 -

The Last Response of Job

*The commentary on the Book of Job, is by Saint Thomas Aquinas and was translated by Brian Mulladay and edited by Rev. Joseph Kenny, O.P.
The book shows how human affairs are ruled by divine providence using probable arguments.*

CHAPTER TWENTY SIX: THE LAST RESPONSE OF JOB

1 Job answered and said: 2 Whose helper are you? Who is then so feeble? Do you sustain the arm of anyone who is not strong? 3 To whom have you given counsel? 4 Perhaps to someone who has not wisdom? And have you shown your very great prudence? Whom do you want to teach? Was he not the one who made the spirit? 5 Behold, giants moan under the waters and those who live with them. 6 Hell is naked before him, and there is no hiding place for perdition. 7 He stretches out the North Wind over the empty air and he hangs the earth on nothing. 8 He builds up the waters in his clouds so that the clouds do not break and fall out at the same time. 9 He keeps hidden the face of his throne and he expands his cloud over it. 10 He has circumscribed a limit on the waters at the boundary between light and darkness. 11 The pillars of heaven tremble and quake with fear at his nod. 12 In his power the seas are suddenly assembled and his prudence smote the proud. 13 His spirit has adorned the heavens, and by his hand he has played midwife and he has drawn out the coiled serpent. 14 Lo, these things have been said about a part of his ways, and when we have scarcely heard a small whisper of his speeches, who can look on the thunder of his greatness?

Baldath wanted in his last speech to convince Job by the consideration of divine power, terrible to all, in respect of which no man can make a pretense of justice, and innocence so that he asserts that he has been punished without sin. So Job give three answers, the first of which is specifically against Baldath, who had tried to frighten Job by the consideration of divine power.

Men who do not use reason against someone condemned, but cite the power and the wisdom of the judge. They usually do this in favor of the judge. Favor is accorded to someone for two reasons: either because of the defect of power of the one favored, or because of his lack of wisdom. As to the first he says, "Whose helper are you? Who is then so feeble?" as if to say: Have you said these things to favor God and not accord with reason as it were, and did you say this to bring help to God as though he were weak? One seems to help someone when he defends his action, and so he says, "And do you sustain the arm of someone who is not strong?" as if to say: Do you want by these words to justify the action of God by which I have been punished by him, as though he were not strong enough to justify himself?

One should not believe that divine providence extends only to judging men in this life, and not after death, as the friends of Job seemed to think.

Since among the angels there are some who fell away from the reverence due to God, about whom he had already spoken, "In his angels he found wickedness" (4:18) as a consequence, he adds a remark making a distinction between the good and evil angels. Now one must suppose that the distinction of spiritual creatures is made at the same time as the distinction of corporeal creatures, and so to suggest the distinction of spiritual creatures he begins with corporeal creation saying, "In his power the seas are suddenly assembled," according to Genesis, "Let the waters be collected which are on the earth in one place and let dry land appear." (1:9) Spiritual creatures are distinguished by divine power just like corporeal creatures, and so he then says, "and his prudence smote the proud," that is, by the power of his providence, the devil who is proud has been deprived of his glory. Therefore, the spiritual gifts for the good angels were increased as he fell, and so he says, "his spirit has adorned the heavens," that is, he has adorned the heavenly spirits with the adornment of spiritual gifts. It was not fitting that he who had fallen by the privation of his glory should remain endowed with his gifts through the Holy Spirit, and so he says, "and by his hand he has played midwife and he drew out," from the society of the good angels, "the coiled serpent," the devil, who is compared to a serpent because of the poison of evil, and is said to be coiled because he is clever. He clearly says he has been drawn out by the hand of God assisting at the birth, as a midwife sometimes draws a child out who is dead so that the mother is not injured. So God has drawn the devil out of the midst of the angels so that the society of the good angels may not suffer detriment in anything.

Lest anyone think that these effects, although they are great, are equal to divine power, he says, "Lo, these things have been said about his ways," of the works by which we ascend to the knowledge of God and God communicates himself in some way to us. Lest these should seem, though not equaling the whole divine power, yet even to come close to equaling it for the most part, he says, "and when we have scarcely heard a small whisper of his speeches, who can look on the thunder of his greatness?" He means: The proportion of the things which have now been said about the effects of divine power are less than the proportion of one small word whispered quietly compared to the loudest clap of thunder.

END OF JOB CHAPTER 26

Then, as for the favor which is shown to someone because of the defect of wisdom, we should consider that this favor is twofold. On the one hand, in that one gives counsel to someone about things to be done, and he speaks to this theme saying, "To whom have you given counsel?" Someone seems to give counsel to another when he defends his cause without reason. God, who is perfect in wisdom, does not stand in need of counsel, and so he says, "Perhaps to someone who has not wisdom?" as if to say: Do you doubt that God has wisdom to speak so stupidly for him? One who gives counsel to a wise man seems to do this to show his own wisdom, and so he then says, "and have you shown your very great prudence?", saying in effect: Do you want to show by this the abundance of your prudence?

The other way of favoring against the lack of wisdom is to instruct the ignorant man concerning what he must know, and as to this he says, "Whom do you want to teach?", for you seemed to teach God when you brought his power against me, but he who is the cause of all human science does not need to be taught, and so he says, "Was he not the one who made the spirit," who created the human soul by which man both understands and breathes? This is the one and the same soul which perceives science by intellect and gives life to the body by the other powers.

Then, lest Job seem to detract from the power of God in anything, he commends it as much more all encompassing than did Baldath, enumerating the many effects of divine power. He begins from those effects which God powerfully worked in the human race in the time of the flood. For in Genesis we read that "there were giants on the earth in those days," (6:4) and "Because God saw that the earth was corrupt, for in fact all flesh had corrupted its way on the earth, he said to Noah, 'The end of all flesh has come before me.'" (6:12) Later he says, "Behold, I will bring the waters of the flood upon the earth and I will kill all flesh." (6:17) He shows this effect of the divine power when he says, "Behold giants," the ancient ones "moan," in the punishments of hell, "under the waters," who were drowned in the waters of the flood. Because not only did they perish, but many others with them then and later, he continues, "and those who live with them," moan in the same way by virtue of his power.

One should not believe that divine providence extends only to judging men in this life, and not after death, as the friends of Job seemed to think. To disprove this he then says, "Hell is naked before him," as if to say: The things which happen in hell are clearly seen by him and happen according to his judgment. To explain this he then says, "and there is no hiding place for perdition," so that those who have perished in hell can be hidden from the eyes of God as they are hidden from our eyes.

Then he lists the effects of divine providence in natural things, and he begins from the two extremes, from earth and heaven. In each of these something appears instituted from divine power which exceeds human strength. As far as what appears to the senses, heaven seems to be extended above the earth like a kind of tent; earth to be under heaven like the floor of the tent. Whoever sets up a tent puts something by which the tent can be supported. This does not seem to be the case with heaven. For there does not seem to be anything sustaining heaven but divine power, and so he says, "he stretches out the North Wind over the empty air." By "North Wind" he means the upper hemisphere from our point of view. For from our point of view the North Pole is raised above the horizon, but the South Pole is depressed below the horizon, and so he says that the North Wind is extended "over the empty air," because nothing of heaven appears to us under the upper hemisphere except space full of air, which unlettered men deem empty. He speaks according to the thinking of the common man as is the custom in Sacred Scripture. Likewise, one who lays a floor puts it on something which is firm. However, the earth, which is like the floor of heaven does not appear to have anything firm which can sustain it, but is only sustained by the power of God, and so he says, "and he hangs the earth upon nothing." These things do not mean that heaven is of great weight and needs to be held up so that it does not fall, or as if earth can fall down to its center, but he means that the natural power themselves by which bodies are naturally contained in their places proceeded from divine power. For as violent motion is from human force, so natural inclination of things proceeds from divine power which is the principle of nature.

Then he enumerates the effects of divine power in the middle space between heaven and earth. First, in the air, where one finds the wondrous fact that water is lifted up as vapor, is suspended in the air, and does not fall all at once, but drop by drop. One sees this in the rain, and so he says, "He binds up the waters in his thick clouds," in clouds caused by his power, "so that the clouds do not break," from the rainwater's, "falling out at the same time," but drop by drop to keep the earth at a moderate temperature. It is as though what remains in the clouds had been bound together to not fall immediately by God's power. For by divine power vapors do not condense at the same time so that they all must fall together after they are converted into water at the same time. After rain falls from the clouds, some remnants of the vapors remain behind, from which the clouds are formed. These conceal heaven from our point of view which is like the throne of God, according to the last chapter of Isaiah, "Heaven is my throne." (66:1) Expressing this he continues, "He keeps hidden the face of his throne," for he holds back as though hiding the face of heaven, which is his throne. He does this by the clouds, which prohibit us from seeing heaven, and so he says, "and he expands his cloud over it," a cloud produced by his power.

Then he shows the effect of divine power on the waters when he says, "He has circumscribed a limit on the waters"; for the waters according to the natural order of the elements should cover every place on the earth, but that some part of the earth remains uncovered by the waters is due to divine power, which has set out a boundary for the water covering the earth. This pertains particularly to the ocean, which surrounds the land everywhere, and because of this he continues, "at the boundary between light and darkness." For the light of day and the dark of night are bounded for us by the sun rising and setting from the upper hemisphere, which is placed over the habitable land, which is enclosed everywhere by the ocean. Or this can be understood to mean that the boundary of the waters will remain unchangeable, as long as this actual state of the world remains in which there is a succession of light and darkness.

After listing the effects of the divine power on corporeal creatures he shows its effect on spiritual creatures which he calls the pillars of heaven, because their duty, in effect, is to preside over the movements of the heaven. So he says, "The pillars of heaven," the angels, "tremble and quake with fear at his nod," that is, they obey him at his nod, and he speaks using the metaphor of a slave obeying the nod of his master in fear and trembling, with fear referring to the soul and trembling to the body. Do not think that there is fear of punishment in the holy angels, for their fear here is called reverential for God: and so their fear refers to the affection, while trembling refers to the exterior effect.