

THE THEORY OF THE PASSIONS IN THE SERMONS  
OF ANTÔNIO VIEIRA S.J. (1608–1697):  
A PHENOMENOLOGICAL READING

1. INTRODUCTION

The passions of the human soul constitute a very crucial theme for the philosophers and theologians of all the times. In modern times we can document an essential contribution which the “Company of Jesus” by its illustrious theologians, philosophers and preachers could offer to such discussion. The Jesuits’ knowledge about the passions theory, for its part, grounded in a rich and long tradition documented and quoted from classical and medieval texts on, such as the *Nicomachean Ethics* and the *Rhetoric* by Aristotle; *the Republic*, *the Timaeus*, *the Symposium* and other works by Plato; the medical treatises made by Galen and Hippocrates; *the City of God* by Augustine of Hippo, the *Summa of Theology* and the treatise *De Veritate* by Thomas Aquinas. According to Massimi<sup>1</sup> the psychosomatic theory of Aristotle and Thomas about passions constitutes the main grounds of Jesuits view in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.

In this work we will try to show how such knowledge reflects in the formulation done by the theologian and Jesuit preacher Antônio Vieira (1607–1697). This author makes use of such theories to be able, in the speech, to move the affections, to persuade the intellect, and to convince the listeners<sup>2</sup>. In his reflection about the nature and the movements of the human soul – followed by Vieira – how it is easy to realize his written collections – a complex route, with no linear identifiable, trying to keep the connection between lived experience and theoretical synthesis offered by classical tradition – no matter pagan or Christian. In a spiritual scope, like that from Jesuits, which value the self-knowledge profoundly, there are various possibilities of realizing the form as they are articulate at the speech by the psychological and cognitive elements, the aspects of memory, senses, imagination, affections and intelligence. Our task has two specific poles of deep thoughts: (1) The description of the phenomenology of love in the sermons preached by Vieira, where

one can see clearly the influence of the treatises about passions and, particularly, the treatise of *Galen De Remedio Amoris*; (2) The analysis of preacher Vieira's speech about the human's five senses and the anatomy of the soul. The objective is to individualize in the preaching of Vieira the elements on which appears an essential description of human subjectivity and its stratified structure.

Anyway, it's worth observing, from the beginning, that the position which Vieira takes on the whole elaboration of the sermons has a value from the point of view of the method that converges on the phenomenological proceedings. First because in his writings one can apprehend, as Stein would say, "... the obscure ways the eye of the one who wishes to understand pursue, and to which profoundness it can penetrate"<sup>3</sup>. On the other hand, the fundamental point is the desire of clarifying the way and the will of enlightening the problems with the stimuli of various traditions. Vieira is a man of action who imposes upon himself an arduous task of inquiring about what he experiences and, on the other hand, can go deeply inside to pick up the essential aspects of his encountering/confronting with other human beings. Obviously the weight of his humanist formation oriented to inquire into the spaces of human subjectivity, keeping the contrast between profoundness and surface, enlarging the knowledge without denying the one ever acquired, aiming to take into conversion – repeating the redeeming gesture of Christ that rescue the human condition from its radical contingency. And what could be, finally, his idea of conversion if it were not the one which helps the human being to get inside himself and listen to the voice that echoes in his interiority?<sup>4</sup>.

## 2. THE PRINCIPLE OF INCARNATION AND THE SACRAMENTAL MODEL

However, the principle about which – theologically – Vieira founds and structures his argumentation, in the beginning of the announcement of the Word, going through the human being defense (the Indians in the forest of Brazil and the new Christians in the Portugal Kingdom), to the State matters, and its prophetic view depend on the Word's incarnation. The reason why the Word, the second Person of the Holy Trinity, was made flesh to help people in their weakness and illness. The meeting of the divine and the human takes place ontologically in the Christ himself, for this reason it is up to the preachers to indicate the value of Christ's word-action as an example. The word which characterizes Christianity, with which in a phenomenological way we are lead into the sacramental world, is the text by John 1, 14: "And