Job in the Reformation Bible: Traditional Religious Belief and Its Critique

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In a stimulating study of ‘literature and the gods’, Robert Calasso reports that the poet Mallarmé was misquoting Euripides when he wrote, shockingly: ‘If the gods do nothing unseemly, then they are no longer gods at all’. For, Calasso says, what Euripides actually wrote was, ‘If the gods do aught unseemly, then they are not gods at all’.[emphasis added]1 In fact, I submit, the two translations are not really antithetical. For both acknowledge – one overtly, the other implicitly – that the Greek gods are not ‘moral’, whether we judge them on the basis of their own ‘unseemly’ deeds or on the basis of the ‘unseemly’ deeds of men and women that they allow to transpire. And, to be sure, by any human standard of judgment, the problem of divine morality persists – indeed, it becomes even more grave – in a world with only one all-powerful and benevolent God.

Of all the books in the Hebrew Bible, none is more perplexing in its audacious acknowledgment of the flawed morality of the Judeo-Christian God than the Book of Job. In the Talmudic period, and throughout the Middle Ages and Early Modern periods, influential rabbis could not decide if Job was a Jew or a gentile, or even if he really existed, and if so, when?2 Was the story a true history, or perhaps it was merely a moral fable? Some early Jewish authorities, followed by Jerome and later Christian commentators, even went so

1 See R. Calasso, Literature and the Gods, T. Parks trans., New York 2001, p. 104. Calasso’s discussion of Mallarmé’s intermediate sources for the Euripidean quotation raises a number of interesting questions, but these are not directly relevant to the present inquiry. Unfortunately, but not surprisingly, Calasso fails to identify the ‘correct’ lines in Euripides. Having searched online versions of all nineteen of Euripides’ extant plays, the closest quotation I find is from Iphigenia at Tauris. Iphigenia speaking: ‘for this truth I hold; / None of the gods is evil, or doth wrong’.

far as to suggest that the book of Job was not written originally in Hebrew, but rather in Arabic or some other language and was only translated into Hebrew. Medieval and early modern Christian commentators, like their Jewish pre-modern counterparts, also struggled with the Book of Job’s perplexities. However, Christian commentators possessed a distinct advantage. Unlike their Jewish predecessors, they could evade the core theological question that the book raises, i.e., the question of righteous suffering, by transposing the tale of Job’s innocent suffering into a Christological allegory.

I

From Late Antiquity and into the early modern period, in scores of Greek, Latin, and vernacular Christian commentaries, Job’s suffering is said to prefigure the Passion of Christ and thereby indirectly evoke the redemptive purpose of the messianic suffering to which it points. If one reads the pre-eminently influential verse-by-verse commentary on Job by Gregory the Great (Moralia in Iob), or any of the many works derived from it, one is surprised to find that Job’s Christ-like innocent suffering is repeatedly stressed but his reiterated, passionate framing of the theodicy question – Why do the righteous suffer and the wicked prosper? – is almost always either ignored or explained away.

With the coming of the Reformation, however, as people were now being urged to read the unglossed vernacular Bible, including the Book of Job, from cover to cover, it was no longer quite so easy to evade the central difficulty of Job. One had better speak of ‘central difficulties’, for there are many, starting with the fact that we see at the outset of the story that an all-powerful and just God can be manipulated by the Satan. And what Satan accomplishes by his manipulation of God is more shocking still. For Satan receives God’s permission to inflict
undeserved pain and loss on a perfectly righteous man, a man who, according to the principle of God's justice set out in Deuteronomy and elsewhere in the Pentateuch, should be living a peaceful life of health, wealth, and abundant posterity. Now, what 'good strategy for survival' – to quote Walter Burkert on the way in which any successful religion must, by definition, be following 'a good strategy for survival' – could the Book of Job possibly be serving by depicting God ruling his heavenly court and overseeing earthly affairs in such a seemingly sadistic and schlemiel-like manner?6

To begin to answer that question, let us recall that the Book of Job ends with its hero, the righteous Job, being restored to double (!) his former position of wealth, receiving ten children again, and living a long and happy life ever after (42.10-17). Clearly, the author of the Book of Job wants to make certain that no absolutely anti-Deuteronomistic conclusions about God’s justice are to be drawn from Job’s case: righteous people do get material rewards, as Deuteronomy promises; Job starts out happy and prosperous and ends up happy and prosperous. Of course, the more difficult question still remains. Why does the author spend most of his time portraying the terrible travesty of God’s satanically inspired injustice, and Job’s refusal to take it lying down?

Simply put, one obvious answer is that the story accords with our experience. As every one knows, there are those relatively rare and to all eyes apparently virtuous people who sometimes do experience inordinate misfortune, ‘trials of Job’. Every one knows someone or knows about someone who has seemingly been singled out for extraordinary suffering. The Book of Job acknowledges that this is the case. And in doing so – unlike Ecclesiastes, which also acknowledges that the wicked prosper and righteous suffer, but says nothing about why this particular ‘vanity of vanities’ comes about – the Book of Job also provides an explanation. Satan convinces God to test Job. Bizarre as the explanation may be, it is an explanation. Moreover, Job’s response to his suffering vindicates God in his wager with Satan (by complaining but not cursing God, Job proves that the malicious Satan was wrong

and God was right). Furthermore, the book allows Job not only to protest his innocence but also to make broader claims about a pattern of similar injustice in God’s world, and to make those claims without losing God’s love and approval. Indeed, it is Job who is said to have spoken truly about God, whereas Job’s comforters, who repeated irrelevant Deuteronomic truisms, are said to have spoken falsely about God (42.7). Finally, God tells the comforters that Job will have to offer sacrifices on their behalf to bring about their vindication (42.8). A marvelous reversal! Job, the passionate protester and critic of divine justice, is vindicated and the comforters, calm, rational, and consistently orthodox theologians, are rebuked. Clearly, traditional religious belief has been called into question. At the same time, how this critique of traditional religious belief also serves as a ‘good strategy’ for reaffirming belief has been hinted at above. Though the Book of Job acknowledges randomness and injustice in the moral universe, it hedges that acknowledgment about with religious myth and a counter claim of hidden purpose in the moral universe. Nothing in the Book of Job effects this simultaneous assertion of moral randomness and moral order more powerfully than the wisdom poems in chapters 28, 37, and 38-41, in which first Job, then Elihu (Job’s fourth, unexpected additional interlocutor) and then God himself all celebrate the beauty, mystery, and terror of the Creation.7

To remind you: following a prose prologue in chapters 1-2, the structure of the central poetic portion of the book, from chapter 3-31, is a three-part round of alternating speeches by Job and his comforters, Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar, arranged as follows: Round 1 (chapters 3-14): 3 Job / 4-5 Eliphaz / 6-7 Job / 8 Bildad / 9-10 Job / 11 Zophar / 12-14 Job; Round 2 (chapters 15-21): 15 Eliphaz / 16-17 Job / 18 Bildad / 19 Job / 20 Zophar / 21 Job; Round 3 (chapters 22-31): 22

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7 Many scholars consider the Elihu speeches and the Wisdom poems to be interpolations. See, for example, C. J. Ball, *The Book of Job: A Revised Text and Version*, Oxford 1922 (rejecting Elihu [pp. 4-7] and the Wisdom chapters [pp. 7-8]). For the long-standing scholarly consensus against the authenticity of Elihu, see W. A. Irwin, ‘The Elihu Speeches in the Criticism of the Book of Job’, *Journal of Religion* 17 (1937), pp. 37-47. On the other hand, H. D. Beeby (in ‘Elihu – Job’s Mediator?’, *South East Asia Journal of Theology* 7 [1965], pp. 33-54) argues convincingly that Elihu functions as Job’s covenant mediator, not a fourth comforter, and that his appearance is vitally integral to the poem.
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Eliphaz / 23-24 Job / 25 Bildad / 26-31 Job (divided as follows: 26-27, 28 [a Wisdom poem; Zophar?], and Job’s final speech in 29-31). The book is finished off by the speeches of Elihu (32-37), God’s answer from the whirlwind (38-41), and a prose epilogue (42).

As one can see, the sequence appears to be defective in the third round, with chapters 26-31 all apparently spoken by Job, and no speech by Zophar. Critics have suggested that the ‘lost speech’ of Zophar is to be found in some part of the presumably misassigned speeches of Job in chapter 27 or 28, or some part of the two combined.8 The ‘Wisdom poem’ in chapter 28 calls for special attention. In chapter 28 of the canonical text, leaving hypothetical recensions aside, Job strikingly anticipates the wisdom poetry of God’s speeches in chapters 38 to 41.9

Beginning with eleven verses in which he lists a series of difficult but attainable wondrous feats in the natural world (the mining of gold, silver, iron, and copper; finding secret pathways unknown even to birds and lions; the channeling or damning of rivers; etc. [28.1-11]), Job then climactically asserts that unlike all of these difficult but attainable natural feats, wisdom remains ultimately inaccessible and unattainable:

12 But where shall wisdom be found? and where is the place of understanding?
13 Man knoweth not the price thereof; neither is it found in the land of the living.
14 The depth saith, It is not in me: and the sea saith, It is not with me.
15 It cannot be gotten for gold, neither shall silver be weighed for the price thereof.
16 It cannot be valued with the gold of Ophir, with the precious onyx, or the sapphire.
17 The gold and the crystal cannot equal it: and the exchange of it shall not be for jewels of fine gold.

No mention shall be made of coral, or of pearls: for the price of wisdom is above rubies. The topaz of Ethiopia shall not equal it, neither shall it be valued with pure gold. Whence then cometh wisdom? and where is the place of understanding? Seeing it is hid from the eyes of all living, and kept close from the fowls of the air.

Following this series of hyperboles and rhetorical questions stating that Wisdom is beyond our reach, Job adds that God is Wisdom's author and its keeper:

Destruction and death say, We have heard the fame thereof with our ears. God understandeth the way thereof, and he knoweth the place thereof. For he looketh to the ends of the earth, and seeth under the whole heaven; To make the weight for the winds; and he weigheth the waters by measure. When he made a decree for the rain, and a way for the lightning of the thunder: Then did he see it, and declare it; he prepared it, yea, and searched it out.

But then, finally, in a surprising reversal, Job concludes that God has told human beings where wisdom resides after all:

And unto man he said, Behold, the fear of the Lord, that is wisdom; and to depart from evil is understanding.

No wonder this chapter has been reassigned by editors to Zophar. The lesson in that final verse – ‘the fear of the Lord, that is wisdom; and to depart from evil is understanding’ – repeats a theme reiterated in the speeches of Zophar and the other comforters, stated repeatedly throughout the Book of Proverbs (e.g., Proverbs 8.12-13, 9.10), and found in other canonical and apocryphal orthodox wisdom literature as well (e.g., Psalms 52, 104; Ecclesiasticus 18.1-13). Indeed, it is a lesson that also serves as the unexpectedly orthodox coda to the otherwise highly unorthodox and pessimistic wisdom of Ecclesiastes:
Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God, and keep his commandments: for this is the whole duty of man.

For God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil.

Strikingly, in chapter 28 Job anticipates the answers to his questions about reward and punishment and righteous suffering that God will offer him in chapters 38-41. These proleptically offered answers include the assertion that world is an incomprehensibly mysterious place, that human wisdom is inadequate to penetrate all of the world’s secrets, that only God can understand and control what is beyond human reach, and that man can therefore do no better than to fear God and keep His commandments – answers, incidentally, that are also anticipated by other speakers earlier in the poem.10

One obvious effect of Job’s proleptic rehearsal of God’s answers in chapter 28 is that it moots the theological conundrum of righteous suffering (if Job already knows what God will later reveal to him, then the questions must not be that critical after all). Instead, our attention turns back to what are in any case the lengthiest and most memorable poetic portions of the poem: Job’s unyielding and repeated rejection of his comforters’ reasonable orthodox pieties, and his equally unyielding and passionate defense of his innocence.

II

Contrasting the ‘passion’ of Job with the ‘reason’ of his comforters brings us directly to my main topic: the question of Job in Renaissance and Reformation thought, in the English Bible, and as an influence on English literature. Within, say, fifty or sixty years on either side of 1611, the year in which the King James Bible appeared, the antithetical terms ‘passion’ and ‘reason’ were undergoing a major realignment. According to William J. Bouwsma, in the debate among Renaissance and Reformation humanists about the status of the emotions, there were two dominant religious and intellectual currents, Stoic Humanism and Augustinian Humanism, that set the principal intellectual and

10 On the proleptic structure of Job and its thematic significance, see Besserman (above, n. 3), pp. 5-33.
religious agenda. A major outcome of the debate was a dramatic shift in philosophical and religious attitudes towards passion and reason.11

Bouwsma uses the term ‘Augustinianism’ to designate a complex of early modern European beliefs. Primary among these beliefs was a respect for what ancient and medieval Stoicism distrusted most, namely, our human will and our passions; and, concomitantly, Augustinianism encouraged a distrust of what ancient and medieval stoics valued most, namely, the cultivation of reason and the practice of *apatheia*.12 Among Stoic thinkers, there was also a clear emphasis on the rational order of nature and on man’s place in that order (as found, for example, in the description of nature in traditional biblical wisdom literature); in addition, stoicism stressed virtue, self-control, and withdrawal from society as necessary ingredients of the good life; and stoicism also insisted on the primacy of philosophy as a tool for achieving the good life.13 In contrast, on the Augustinian side, emphasis was placed on the legitimacy of the controlled expression of passion, on social action as essential to the good life, on rhetoric rather than philosophy as the most effective tool for achieving well-being, on the mystery of the cosmos and man’s place in it (as we find it, for example, in the description of nature in the Book of Job), and, most importantly, on the Bible rather than philosophy as the surest guide to the good life.

As Bouwsma demonstrates – with ample quotations from the works of Petrarch, Valla, Erasmus, Calvin, Luther, and other influential Renaissance and Reformation figures – there was often a tension between, and occasionally there was even a fusion of, clashing stoic humanist and Augustinian humanist doctrines in the work of the same author.14 Nevertheless, the two doctrines are easily distinguishable.

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13 On stoicism in Renaissance and Reformation thought, see Bouwsma, pp. 31-42.

14 For evidence of ‘ambiguity’ and a ‘dialectic’ between Augustinianism and stoicism in Renaissance and Reformation thought, see Bouwsma, pp. 58-64.
Because Augustinianism also rejected the spiritual and political elitism of Stoicism, it was, as Bouwsma says, ‘more sympathetic to those populist movements that found religious expression in the dignity of lay piety, [and] political expression in the challenge of republicanism to despotism’. For Augustinian humanists, ‘it was obvious that if rational insight into cosmic order could not supply the principles of either religious or political life, neither the church nor civil society could be governed by the sages’. In the following section, I shall briefly explain how a remarkable shift in the interpretation of Job from the Middle Ages to the Renaissance and Reformation may be better understood in light of the clash between Stoicism and Augustinianism outlined above. My focus will be on Luther and Calvin.

III

As Richard Strier has recently reminded us, it was Luther himself (whom Bouwsma curiously fails to include in his list of Renaissance and Reformation Augustinian thinkers) who repeatedly privileged the expression of emotion as proper and even virtuous Christian behavior. Luther makes his case for emotional expression by citing the lamenting Virgin Mary of popular tradition and the lamenting biblical David of the Psalms as fitting examples for emulation, while at the same time criticizing the stoic ascetic ideal because it ‘encouraged not only pride in its practitioners but also a false and psychologically dangerous moral and spiritual perfectionism’. Strier, however, neglects to mention the relevance of the Book of Job to the restraint versus passion debate.

15 Bouwsma, p. 54. Bouwsma adds: ‘This conviction had deep roots in Italian humanism’; and in support, he cites C. Trinkaus, In Our Image and Likeness: Humanity and Divinity in Italian Humanist Thought, Chicago 1970.
16 Bouwsma, p. 54.
17 R. Strier, ‘Against the Rule of Reason: Praise of Passion from Petrarch to Luther to Shakespeare, to Herbert’, in: G. K. Paster, K. Rowe, and M. Floyd-Wilson eds., Reading the Early Modern Passions: Essays in the Cultural history of Emotion, Philadelphia 2004, p. 30. Strier (pp. 30-31) cites Luther’s comments on the spiritual pride of asceticism and the positive example of Mary and David in his commentary on Galatians. For another typical instance of Luther’s rejection of ascetic spirituality, see his attack on the ‘delusion of Carthusian monastic asceticism, in his sermon on John 14:5-6, in Luther’s Works [American Edition], 55 vols., J. Pelikan and D. E. Poellot (vols. 1-30) and H. T. Lehmann (vols. 31-55) eds., Saint Louis and Philadelphia 1955-1986; volume 24 (1961), pp. 35-36; and for an additional instance of Luther’s citation of the lamenting David as a model to emulate, see Luther’s Works on John 16:23, pp. 387-388.
Though Luther did not write an extended commentary on the Book of Job, he often refers to Job in his works. How he interpreted the figure of Job is well evidenced in his brief preface to the Book of Job in his German Bible translation. Radically departing from the medieval view of Gregory the Great and later medieval commentators – the view according to which Job never (or hardly ever, and then only modestly) criticizes God, and according to which all of Job’s only apparent protestations of innocence and indictments of God’s injustice are to be glossed away as allegorically pious rather than literally blasphemous assertions – Luther comes right out and says that ‘Job stands firm, and contends that God torments even the righteous without cause other than that this be to God’s praise, as Christ also testifies in John 9[:3] of the man who was born blind’. Luther, in fact, goes even further. For he completely abandons the standard medieval claim that Job was unwaveringly patient throughout his trial and generalizes from the specific case of Job to the human condition at large, asserting that the Book of Job

is written for our comfort, [showing] that God allows even his great saints to falter, especially in adversity. For before Job comes into fear of death, he praises God at the theft of his goods and the death of his children. But when death is prospect and God withdraws himself, Job’s words show what kind of thoughts a man – however holy he may be – holds toward God: he thinks God is not God, but only a judge and a wrathful tyrant, who storms ahead and cares nothing for a person’s life. This is the finest part of this book. It is understood only by those who also experience and feel what it is to suffer the wrath and judgment of God, and to have his grace hidden.

IV

In a similar break from medieval tradition, Calvin also privileged the expression of emotion. Like Luther, Calvin also stressed the exemplarity of the lamenting David in Psalms. In his Introduction to his commentary

19 Luther’s Works, volume 35, p. 252.
on Psalms, Calvin writes (with a rare autobiographical aside): ‘in unfolding the internal affections both of David and of others, I discourse upon them as matters of which I have familiar experience’. \(^{20}\) Calvin frequently refers to Job, and deals with him at length in a sermon sequence that is one of his longest. \(^{21}\) Also like Luther, Calvin rejected the medieval Joban tradition, in which Job is a saintly figure, stating that Job murmured against God and that if at first he was ‘constant and virtuous’, later on ‘the infirmity of his flesh caused him to bend so that he murmured against God’ and spoke in ways that are reprehensible. \(^{22}\) Job teaches us, Calvin says, that all men are unstable, and liable either to swerve from the path of virtue or stay on that path, only as God wills it:

However, we see the sudden change that came over Job [in chapter 3]. For it seems that there was no new occasion for him to become vexed and curse the day of his birth … he seems to have become a different person, but one need only turn the hand and all our virtue is fled, unless God continues to assists us. \(^{23}\)

Calvin is unequivocal; Job’s ‘cursing the day of his birth’ was ‘inexcusable’, one cannot deny that Job went too far. \(^{24}\) But notice how Calvin stops short of calling Job a sinner. Instead, Calvin’s point is that Job is typical of people whose passions ‘boil over’ – warning us, by example, that we must pray to God for grace to withstand the assaults of enemies not only from without but also from within, and

21 For Calvin’s sermons on Job, see volumes 33-35 in: W. Baum, E. Cunitz and E. Reuss eds., Ioannis Calvini opera quae supersunt omnia, 59 volumes Corpus Reformatorum 29-87, Brunswick 1863-1900 (repr. New York 1964).
22 ‘Là où auparavant il n’y avoit que constance et vertu en luy, il y a un meslinge, que l’infirmité de sa chair le fait cliner en sorte qu’il mumure contre Dieu’ (‘Sermon 11’, p. 140). For a detailed analysis of Calvin’s interpretation of the Book of Job, see Schreiner, (above, n. 5), pp. 91-155, 228-250.
23 ‘Cependant nous voyons le changement qui est advenu soudain à lobb: car il ne semble point qu’il ait occasion nouvelle [!] de se despiter ainsi, et de maugreer le jour de sa naissance … il semble que ce soit un homme tout divers, mais il ne faudra que tourner la main, que toute nostre vertu s’esvanovyra, sinon que Dieu continue à nous assister’ (‘Sermon 11’, p. 141).
24 ‘Mais voici Iob qui maudit le iour de sa naissance: et en cela il n’est point excusables, on ne peut dire qu’il ne soit excessif’ (‘Sermon 11’, p. 145).
that we must be zealous, lest we fail to restrain our emotions and thereby allow ourselves to be defeated by ‘enemies from within’.  

In his *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, Calvin illustrates the enormity of God’s power by quoting or paraphrasing a string of phrases describing God in the Book of Job: ‘by whose brightness the stars are darkened’ [Job 3.9]; ‘by whose strength the mountains are melted; by whose wrath the earth is shaken’ [Job 9.5-6]; ‘whose wisdom catches the wise in their craftiness’ [Job 5.13]; ‘beside whose purity all things are defiled’ [compare Job 25.5]; ‘whose righteousness not even the angels can bear’ [compare Job 4.18]; ‘who makes not the guilty man innocent’ [compare Job 9.20]; ‘whose vengeance when once kindled penetrates to the depths of hell’ [Deut. 32.22; and compare Job 26.6].

Then, in conclusion, Calvin asserts, ‘this whole discussion will be foolish and weak unless every man admit his guilt before the Heavenly Judge, and concerned about his acquittal, willingly cast himself down and confess his nothingness’. Of course, the mode of ‘confession’ Calvin is recommending – with every man casting himself down before God and confessing his nothingness – differs markedly from the liturgically ritualized sacrament of auricular confession practiced in the Catholic Church. Paradoxically, Calvin urges a direct and highly emotive personal appeal by the sinner to God on the basis of quotations from Job – all of which, however, ostensibly prove that man has no right to expect a sympathetic hearing!

Similarly, later in the same chapter, Calvin remarks that because all

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25 ‘Quand Iob parle ainsi, nous voyons encores mieux comme les homes n’ont nulle mesure ne fin, si tost que leurs passions ont commencé a bouillir. … Nous voyons le zele que qui doit estre en nous … aussi que nous prions Dieu qu’il nous face la grace de nous y pouvoir employer, et de nous fortifier aussi contre toutes les tentations qui nous pourroyent advenir: et non seulement contre les combats qui nous seront faits par les ennemis au dehors, mais contre les affections qui sont dedans nous, si tost que leur passions ont commencé a bouillir … qu’on ne les peut pas retenir … non seulement les ennemis au dehors mais contre les affections qui sont dedans nous’ (‘Sermon 11’, p. 152).


human works, ‘if judged according to their own worth [are] filth and defilement’, we must therefore turn with ‘awakened consciences’ and ‘descend from divine contemplation’ in order ‘to look upon ourselves without flattery and without being affected by blind self-love’. Calvin adduces numerous verses from Job (including a verse of Job’s overt self-condemnation) to prove that ‘depravity’ is essential to the human condition:

Job 25.6: Man is far from being justified before God, man who is rottenness and a worm;
Job 15.16: ..., abominable and empty, who drinks iniquity like water;
Job 14.14: For who could make clean what has been conceived of unclean seed? Not one;
Job 9.20: If I would show myself innocent, my own mouth will condemn me; if righteous, it will prove me perverse.

Job may be an incorrigible sinner for Calvin, but what follows from that estimate of the biblical figure, and from Calvin’s sense of every man or woman’s utter inability to effect his or her own salvation by observing God’s law, is not quite despair, but rather a highly emotive desperation (ultimately relieved by faith in Christ), a desperation that finds its permissible expression in words. From Augustine to Innocent III to Margery Kempe to Thomas à Kempis, rhetorically elaborate expressions of human sinfulness were commonplace, but the novelty in Reformation Europe was the discovery that such expressions were now required not just of the learned or professionally devout but of everybody. And Job – not marked as an Israelite or a Jew, with no sign of a legitimated clergy or priesthood in his world – was the perfect biblical hero to underwrite this change.

For Luther, Calvin and other Protestant thinkers, the lamenting Mary of tradition and the penitent David of Psalms were convincing representatives of the Augustinian humanist position validating passion and its expression. Job, however, provided an even more powerful instance of the divinely sanctioned expression of emotion. Though Job

28 Calvin, Institutes, 3.12.4-5, p. 759.
29 Calvin, Institutes, 3.12.4-5, p. 759.
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was wrong to accuse God of injustice, he was right to observe that the Deuteronomic scheme of quid-pro-quo justice, defended by the comforters, does not operate consistently.  

Bypassing law, prophecy, and traditional biblical wisdom, and featuring a hero who is incomparably righteous but nevertheless lacks the essential Israelite lineage of the biblical patriarchs, prophets, and sages of the wisdom tradition, the Book of Job implicitly asserts the inadequacy of all rational and Scripture-based knowledge. It also was taken to affirm the sufficiency of faith and awe at the sublimity of the divinely ordered universe, and also to allow for the expression of passionate protest in the face of a seeming lack of moral order.

In closing, I offer a hypothesis. The Book of Job, especially after it had been translated into the vernaculars of Europe, became a major influence not only on Renaissance and Reformation religious thought and practice, but also on the best work of major writers as diverse in their religious outlooks and literary fields of endeavor as Shakespeare (in King Lear and elsewhere), Herbert (in ‘The Collar’ and elsewhere), Donne (in his ‘Holy Sonnets’) and Milton (in Samson Agonistes, Paradise Lost, Paradise Regained, and elsewhere). Exposing Christian orthodoxy to philosophical doubt and rhetorical probing, Job, like no other book of the Bible, inspired early-modern writers (and later writers, too) in ways that we have yet to appreciate.

30 As Schreiner (above, n. 5), points out, in comparing David and Job, Calvin takes pains to distinguish between cases of retributive (David-like) suffering versus non-retributive (Job-like) suffering (pp. 99-105).


32 A worthy first step – not on Job especially, but on the intellectual background of ‘Protestant affectivity’ in which the Joban influence would flourish – is Richard Strier’s analysis of new attitudes to emotion evident in Shakespeare’s Comedy of Errors and King Lear; and, as Strier demonstrates, similar attitudes are also evident in ‘the privileged status of emotion in Herbert’ (nicely illustrated in Strier’s [above, n. 17, pp. 32-42] brief analyses of Herbert’s ‘Longing’, ‘Sion’, ‘Gratefulnesse’, and the ‘Storm’).