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**Job, the Knight of Faith: A Book Review of
Professor Rudolph Vanterpool's *In Job's Sandals*¹**

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Rudolph V. Vanterpool, *In Job's Sandals—From Riches to Rags to Rewards: Topical Studies on the Book of Job* (NY: Vantage Press, 2010; 331p.).

In 2010, Vanterpool was professor of philosophy and former chairman of that department at California State University, Dominguez Hills, and in 1999 he was named Outstanding Professor for that university.

Not often do we have a professional philosopher willing to tackle the enormous challenges forced upon biblical Job, whose name has become a timeless picture for a person in a long-enduring nearly unbearable series of tragedies. Job's unique duress causes problems. We do not use the word *Job*

¹ See www.CSUDH.edu. Vanterpool has a Ph.D. from Southern Illinois Univ. and a J.D. from the Univ. of West Los Angeles School of Law and has written articles on ethics and philosophy of law and chapters in anthologies, including *Speak My Soul: Poems on Migrations and Returns of a Native Son* (forthcoming, AuthorHouse, 2010); "Subsistence Welfare Benefits as Property Interests: Legal Theories and Moral Considerations," chapter 21, *A Companion to African-American Philosophy*, Tommy L. Lott and John P. Pittman, Editors (Blackwell Publishing Ltd., 2003); "Hume on the 'Duty' of Benevolence" *Hume Studies* Volume XIV, Number 1 (April, 1988), 93-110; "Open-Textured Aesthetic Boundaries: Matters of Art, Race, and Culture," *The Critical Pragmatism of Alain Locke*, Leonard Harris, Editor (Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 1999); "Affirmative Action Revisited: Justice and Public Policy Considerations," *3:4 Public Affairs Quarterly* (1989, pp. 49-61); and "Welfare Rights and Procedural Due Process," *Logos: Philosophical Issues in Christian Perspective* (Volume 6, 1985), pp. 79-89.

² Maness' web domain is www.PreciousHeart.net and he has written eight books and many articles, including *Would You Lie to Save a Life—a Theology on the Ethics of Love* (Bloomington, IN: AuthorHouse, out in late 2007, 434p.), *Heart of the Living God—Love, Free Will, Foreknowledge, Heaven: a Theology on the Treasure of Love* (Bloomington, IN: AuthorHouse, 2004; 704p.), *Heaven—Treasures of Our Everlasting Rest* (Bloomington, IN: AuthorHouse, 2004), *Queen of Prison Ministry—The Story of Gertha Rogers, First Woman to Minister on Texas Death Row* (Bloomington, IN: AuthorHouse, 2008; 200p.), *Ocean Devotions—From the Hold of Charles H. Spurgeon, Master of Mariner Metaphors* (Bloomington, IN: AuthorHouse, 2008; 431p.), *Character Counts—Freemasonry USA Is a National Treasure and a Source of Our Founding Fathers' Constitutional Original Intent* (Indianapolis, IN: AuthorHouse, 2005; 705p.; major revision due in 2010), *Precious Heart, Broken Heart—Love and the Search for Finality in Divorce* (Bloomington, IN: AuthorHouse, 2000; 175p.), and a novel *Fringes of Freedom and Liberty Weekend 1986: A Place to Return After Dark* (Bloomington, IN: AuthorHouse, 2000; 329p.).

as a metaphor often, preferring usage as a simile or in hyperbole, for very few dilemmas compare to Job's plight. In other words, we say a person is *like* Job, meaning that the person is struggling *very* hard, but we rarely if ever say this person *is* Job in his or her suffering. Job's plight is so utterly despairing that its uniqueness in human existence makes it one of the hardest to understand and relate to. Often, we do not even try to understand.

Many pull a few exquisite passages from the book of Job in order to find a timely word, and much of the time people pull outside of the context of Job's suffering. Most focus upon Job's spiritual setup at the beginning of the book or upon the endgame, and then offer a rather simple lesson on God rewarding faith. Very much like spiritual-politically correct speech, Christians are simply supposed to endure and be faithful—*see Job*. Similarly, some use Job as an example of God rewarding a person who has endured, though that is not the primary message of Job; we do not endure simply for an earthly reward, nor are we ever promised such in the Christian life. While the book of Job is a meaningful staple for spiritual comfort, still, the gold is *within* Job's endurance while suffering.

How timely then, and fortunate for us, that Vanterpool sat down with Job and wrestled with its hardest dilemmas. His seasoned philosophical muscle pulled from every corridor ancient and modern to present to us lessons that are as timeless as the story of Job itself. Often with colorful metaphors—indeed, just as he opened his preface, “Every once in a while the sweet juices of inspiration wash over us” and impel our “creative energy”—Vanterpool began early to detail the philosophical depth resident in the “tragic saga of the knight of faith” (ix). At the end of this book, one not only appreciated the depth of Job's suffering in a fresh light, but one came to appreciate the usefulness of classic philosophy to classic theological struggles within a biblical context.

In Vanterpool's introduction, under the sub-heading “A Divine Drama of Epic Magnitude,” he laid out the scope and the layers of meaning resident in Job, illustrating from personal experience how some people find Job tedious, and tedious because they largely do not appreciate or will not face the specialness of Job's suffering. Job is not merely a “tragic hero” like we see in biblical Samson and the Grecian story of Trojan love, but Job is a “knight of faith” like Abraham in the “lived-experience of despair” that sets Job on “a higher plane” because the *knight of faith* does not seek approval from others like the mere hero, for—a real jewel—“The knight of faith faces the divine lawgiver as a solitary agent” (13).

In chapter one, Vanterpool theologized on Satan's negotiations with God, and there are spiritual implications to the “hedge” of protection “erected around Christ's followers” (34). An important element resided in what the negotiations behind Job's back meant for Job—yes, we can all

relate to that! It is a plight of suffering *caused* by agents far above us and from all vantage points without any consideration to Job (or me and my living of life). Job was a good man, what happened was not right on the surface (much more wrong if he had seen Satan’s bargaining), and it was human to feel the pain of such losses. Job was a “stalwart saint” in that he was “*made to suffer through no fault of his own*” (35). There is an unsolvable mystery to theodicy that we all must accept. Illustrating from the works of Bart D. Ehrman, Alain Locke, and W. E. B. Du Bois, we need to attune ourselves to not merely *think on* but rather to *hurt with* the person who is struggling. So apropos, the journey of Job mirrored the sufferings of slaves groaning “for final reconciliation in some unseen power,” the experience itself becoming cathartic when the suffering reaches “deep inside our” immortal and “hungering souls, impressing upon us that our restlessness too will pass” (41).

While the hero merely strives to please others, the knight of faith endures for God’s sake, relying upon his trust in God. That is not a simple-minded conclusion, nor another trite or mechanical saying, for Vanterpool took us on a journey to the heart of philosophy in a decisively Christian context. We must not merely cogitate upon the meanings of suffering. To truly get at any person’s suffering, Job being the chief example of mysterious unreasonable suffering, we *must* feel with them and hurt with them on a deep level. That was the true beginning of Job’s long story and a hardy lesson for us.

In chapter two, we pass through the “House of Pain” where Vanterpool began with a quotation from the inimitable Emerson: “He has seen but half the universe who never has been shown the house of pain” (43). If we must suffer, it helps to share with a trusted confidante—“we all need friends” (49). No platitudes here. In very deep suffering, when even God seems distant, the only solace is a friend, even friends who fail to understand. Illustrating from Clause Westermann and David Clines, we take note of our mortality, for the largest lesson in Job is about us and how we ourselves would deal with such suffering.

Leading naturally into chapter 3, then, “The Heart of a True Friend,” the largest lesson unfolds. Illustrating from singer Paul Simon, several *Peanuts* cartoon characters, and the essentials of the meaning of friendship in the writings of Plato and Aristotle, Professor Vanterpool demonstrated that the nature of a good and genuine friendship transcends mere “liking” individuals for some particular end, like pleasure, but “liking” them for who they are as a person. That is not a mere choice to sympathize, either—all people can sympathize—instead, we ought to feel with another in their suffering as part of our core values in how we live our lives as Christians.

In chapter 4, “Where Does One Go When No One Seems to Understand?” (Reviewer’s paraphrase), the author probes the depths of personal anguish and despair. Indeed, “Probably the last thing on Job’s mind was to wage a battle of words” with his friends (91). Despite all, Job’s despair is not, thankfully, a Kierkegaardian “sickness unto death” (98-100). Job was denied decent comfort. But he became the “real winner” in the end because he understood that he *must* look to God for hope and, consistent with this sincerely held belief in the Creator’s divine promises, he *does* look to God.

In chapter 5, when alleged to be a hypocrite, Job’s dilemma and suffering force us to philosophically grapple with our view of existence itself. This is no easy thing. By the time the reader arrived to this chapter, and likely before, either the reader has been grappling with the deeper issues or is yawning with a desire to look elsewhere for his or her ice cream. That was Vanterpool’s greatest challenge, too, and his passion, to place the philosophical dilemma in common enough language without also neutering Job’s plight, and Vanterpool’s expertise shined here. Here, in an artful way and without really saying so, it dawned on me that throughout and especially in this chapter that Vanterpool had showed us how philosophy was the bedrock to our inner psychology. Several principles must come of age in our life to anchor us philosophically, thereby granting us psychological courage and even faith and hope—not the least of these being an acceptance of what we see (and what neither A. J. Ayer nor Rudolf Carnap were able to appreciate), a spiritual participation, and a realization of a degree of incomprehensibility, all in view that “the knight of faith is in the hands of a Mighty God” (123). No cheap faith here. No simple *pass go and get \$200*. No sir, for the most valuable elements of faith and hope are earned through suffering.

Chapter 6 closed Job’s first round of debates (Job 11-14) with the need, at times, to fire back honest indignation. While mere rhetorical jousting is often a waste of time, there is a fine but certain line between indignation and retaliation. We ought not merely respond to an offense with guttural vengeance, but we may pull from the depth of our heart a response that in the end “pleads his case before the tribunal of the Lord” (150).

In chapter 7 on Job 15-17, Vanterpool opened with a quote from an unknown author, “Trying to settle a problem with oratory is like attempting to unsnarl a traffic jam by blowing horns.” As he did throughout, Vanterpool tossed in a personal reflection upon his life, reiterating with another quote from Sir Thomas Fuller: “Corn can’t expect justice from a court composed of chickens” (both 151). Job threw the ball of justice into his critics’ court.

Chapters 8 and 9 covered Job 18-24. Appearance can cloud virtuous character, and indeed, “the moral high road isn’t normally an easy matter” (167). In his famous “I Have a Dream” speech, Martin Luther King Jr. said, “We will not be satisfied until justice rolls down like waters, and righteousness like a mighty stream.” No one can truly place a blockade upon the quality of one’s character. Then, with some humor from Wiley cartoons and *Peanuts*, certainly, perceptions can mislead, and Job had had enough of his own self-pity and took the offensive posture.

In chapter 10 covering Job 25-31, Vanterpool began with a quote from Catherine of Siena, “Where there is a feast of words there is often a famine of wisdom,” noting how the knight of faith, Job, appeared to be finally winning the struggle with his friends. In response to pathetic Bildad, Job gave his longest and in many cases his most substantial response, outlining the nature of divine wisdom. Vanterpool gently guided us over the everglades of epistemology, the study of knowledge itself. Sometimes one can see best when on the bottom, physically and emotionally, where only the light of God can make the darkness light again. The conditions for receiving wisdom, at first easy, involve willingness, yet—clearly—such willingness is easier said than done. For Job a certain level of wisdom only comes with a “state of mind of unshakable faith” that through all “strengthened him with the assurance that he is not a hypocrite and that he has nothing to conceal,” yes, and then, “God will open his [Job’s] eyes to the truth in his own time” (217). A confidence in God is the true fount of wisdom for us here on earth, and though easy to say, the perseverance of Job revealed to us that wisdom is not merely for the claiming. Illustrating from Plato’s *Republic* and *Meno* how practice and more practice can perfect skills, Vanterpool pointed out that true wisdom was “acquired over a period of time” (234). Some of the best of wisdom can only come as the result of practice and practice of *living* for God when seemingly all alone in the great struggle. We must ask God for help in time of need, as simple as that it is, but the deepest wisdom only comes when the heart is habitually looking to God.

In chapter 11, the youthful Elihu brings forth a respectful challenge to his elders and to Job. Here is the example of age and youth meeting each other half way. Why is Job *not* recovering from his afflictions? If Job would just come clean with God, God would bless. Like so many, it did not escape the elders that this youth was clouded and held too high an opinion of himself.

Chapter 12 covered Job 38-42, where we are made privy to God’s intervention in his servant’s predicament. God visited Job personally, speaking through the whirlwind, moving Job to a high understanding of his own trivial complaints. Job got the one-on-one talk he had wanted, and God

set the record straight. Though one of the “great paradoxes of our Christian faith,” nevertheless, God did then with Job and will with us too, “use bad circumstances to help us mature in our Christian walk” (287).

In chapter 13, Vanterpool closed his book with a short reflection on the “House of a Thousand Dreams” from Job 29:2-6, where Job pondered his happy past life.³ Though in utter despair, there was little comfort in the past experience of a good life. That distant past life itself hurt, that “gaze backwards had a great deal more to do with bygone happiness than with ... his current existential plight” (291), for the very recollection is a kind of cruelty. In that distant past life of bliss, Job had then longed for a blissful old age. Back then, Job was but a dreamer, now he wished for death: his “house of a thousand dreams had been transformed overnight into an infirmary of a thousand haunting nightmares” (292). Job’s past prosperity was real, the bliss of days gone by had *not* been forgotten, and Job knew what a good life was. That kind of contemplation can ruin a weak faith, but it can mature and even refine a solid faith. While we look back, from time to time, nevertheless, we live our life facing the future. If we are suffering, we pray and hope for release, trying to trust God, and even *dream* of a house of peace that is only reached through passage on the train of faith.

Citing several warriors of the faith like Moses of old and Martin Luther King Jr. of late, Vanterpool challenged us to think again on Job, not as a mere story about physical rewards, but about the deeper treasures of a faith, hope, and love in God that becomes all the more philosophically rooted in our perseverance. We accept that challenge and agree most heartily that we must “dare to dream.... A single dream can turn the world upside down.... When the Lord takes hold of our dreams and sets our feet on the Rock to stay, we are no longer just on our own. The dream ceases to be a thought construct and gradually but surely takes on the body of a deed rich with the potential for transforming already bad situations into far better ones” (304). Therein, through a long and great battle with suffering, Job was mighty in valor and truly became for time immemorial *the* knight of faith.



³ Job 29:2-6: “Oh that I were as in months past, as in the days when God preserved me; When his candle shined upon my head, and when by his light I walked through darkness; As I was in the days of my youth, when the secret of God was upon my tabernacle; When the Almighty was yet with me, when my children were about me; When I washed my steps with butter, and the rock poured me out rivers of oil.”
