

THE ETERNAL PLAN OF DIVINE PROVIDENCE

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IN WHAT sense is God's providence a plan? In speaking of the order of created things to the end as this order exists eternally in God's mind, we employ terminology derived from human activity and speak of it as a plan. Evidently we are using an analogy. To what extent is this analogy valid? At what point does God's providence escape the human category of "plan" and assert its own transcendental uniqueness and mystery?

Not a great deal has been written about this question, and in recent years even fewer theologians than formerly are found who discuss it.¹

¹ The following studies (listed alphabetically by author) have proved particularly helpful in preparing this article: John Baillie, *The Sense of the Presence of God* (London, 1962): Baillie was a Protestant theologian who died shortly after giving these Gifford Lectures (1961-62), which include a very perceptive discussion of divine providence. Joseph Collins, O.P., "God's Eternal Law," *Thomist* 23 (1960) 497-532: a generally excellent article showing the relationship between the eternal law and providence. Hyacinthe-M. Dion, O.P., "La prédestination chez saint Paul," *Rech. de sc. relig.* 53 (1965) 5-43: contains an excellent bibliography on its subject and stresses the social character of Pauline predestination. André Feuillet, S.S., "Isaïe (le livre d')," *Dictionnaire de la Bible, Supplément* 4, 647-729: contains an excellent treatment of the plan of God as taught by Isaiah. Langdon B. Gilkey, "The Concept of Providence in Contemporary Theology," *Journal of Religion* 43 (1963) 171-92: a Protestant theologian seeks to account for the absence of discussions on providence in contemporary Protestant theology. Aside from Darwinism and the failure to see divinely ordered purpose, he finds the deepest root in the epistemology of present-day Protestantism, which finds God only in "encounter" and avoids all "objective" statements; he suggests that perhaps the epistemology needs revising. Bernard Lonergan, S.J., "St. Thomas' Thought on *gratia operans*," *THEOL. STUDIES* 3 (1942) 69-88, 375-402, 533-78: a remarkable grasp of St. Thomas' position and several helpful observations on the relation of created activity to divine causality. Jacques Maritain, *Existence and the Existent* (New York, 1957): the chapter on "The Free Existent and the Free Eternal Purpose" shows great originality of thought and has stimulated much literature on the subject. J.-H. Nicolas, O.P., "La permission du péché," *Revue thomiste* 60 (1960) 5-37, 185-206, 509-46: a forceful presentation of "classical Thomism," i.e., Bannezianism. The most obscure point in the presentation is the culpability of the defect in the will on account of which God does not give an efficacious grace. This difficulty seems to me insuperable. He has a fine review of other recent attempts to deal with the problem of moral evil: Rasolo, Marin-Sola, Muniz, and Maritain. H. Rondet, S.J., "Prédestination, grâce, et liberté," *Nouvelle revue théol.* 69 (1947) 449-74: discusses the position of the Thomists, the Molinists, Sertillanges, de la Taille, and concludes with personal reflections strongly influenced by Maritain. Matthias

Perhaps it is a sign of the times that a problem which at first glance seems exclusively metaphysical should fail to interest us greatly as we are taken up with the scriptural renewal of dogmatic theology. But the question is finally unavoidable, and the answer one attempts to give to it will necessarily affect all the rest of one's theological outlook. In this study we will first consider certain difficulties to be found in the way this matter is ordinarily presented. Then we will look to Sacred Scripture for a more enriched view of the matter. Finally, after reviewing briefly the few pertinent declarations of the magisterium, we will attempt a positive answer to the question "In what sense is divine providence a plan?"

ORDINARY PRESENTATION

Most approaches to the question of providence reflect the hand of the master, St. Thomas Aquinas, though they do not always have the breadth and depth of his presentation. The order of things to the end is a good existing in the world, and God is the cause of all good. Hence, this order pre-exists in God as in its cause; and since God is a cause who operates through intellect and will, this order pre-exists in the divine mind and is applied by the divine will. As pre-existing in the divine mind, it is providence; its actual application to creatures is divine government.²

This analysis is undoubtedly true, but it is deceptively simple. We seem to have the answer to our original question without any difficulty. Just as a human plan is an intelligible order of things to an end decided upon in advance and put into execution through human power, so God's providence is an intelligible order eternally existing in His mind which His will has freely and efficaciously chosen to embody in a contingent and finite world.

But a closer look at this contingent, finite world suggests that matters are not quite so simple. Two facts in particular point to the need

J. Scheeben, *The Mysteries of Christianity* (St. Louis, 1946) Chap. 26, "Nature of Predestination": one of the most brilliant and penetrating studies ever made of this thorny problem. W. L. Ysaac, "The Certitude of Providence in St. Thomas," *Modern Schoolman* 38 (1961) 305-21: manifests an excellent methodology in tracing the historical development of the question in St. Thomas; but considering the difficulty of the question, the methodology does not seem to have been applied sufficiently in depth.

² Cf. *Sum. theol.* 1, q. 22, a. 1.

of some further development and clarification. These facts are created liberty in general and the abuse of created liberty through sin in particular. If the creature does truly have the power to determine its own activity to one among a number of possible lines of action, the simple idea of a planned order to the end eternally conceived by God and infallibly executed by His will clearly requires some further explanation.

St. Thomas himself seems to have done little more than set the widest possible metaphysical framework within which some further explanation may be set. He appealed to the transcendence of the divine mind and the divine will. In accordance with this, the planning intelligence of God has present to it rather than subsequent to it all the moments and activities of the temporal continuum, and the omnipotent will of God moves and applies created wills without destroying their liberty.³ The central mystery here lies in the dependence of creatures and the temporal order upon God, and the inclusion of time within eternity. The attempts to articulate this mystery more fully have met with no very wide acceptance. Jean Daniélou, writing in a slightly different context, remarks that neither Báñez nor Molina has found a satisfactory answer to the problem.⁴

The Bannezian or classical Thomist school attempts to resolve the problem by giving to a created physical premotion the same kind of transcendence that is proper to the uncreated activity of God Himself.

³ Cf. *ibid.* 1, q. 14, a. 13; q. 23, a. 4; *In 1 Peri hermeneias*, lect. 14. The following remarks of Bernard Lonergan on the transcendence of the divine will reveal a most important insight: "Moreover—and now we come to grips with the issue—the solution not only is not a mere function of time but not even an exclusive function of knowledge. Exactly the same solution holds if the objection takes the form: If God wills this, this must be: '... quamvis voluntas Dei sit immutabilis et invincibilis, non tamen sequitur quod omnis effectus eius sit necessarius necessitate absoluta, quam habet res a causa sua proxima, sed solum necessitate conditionata, sicut et de praescientia dictum est' [*In 1 Sent.*, dist. 47, q. 1, a. 1, ad 2m]. Take the tip, and you will find that the solution given for knowledge is equally valid for divine will. Nor is there any use objecting that there is no parity, that knowledge as such is not causal, while will is; for, according to St. Thomas, God does not know passively, by being acted upon by the object after the fashion of our senses. He knows actively: 'scientia Dei est causa rerum'—part of the production of the object and not its subsequent effect" ("St. Thomas' Thought on *gratia operans*," *THEOL. STUDIES* 3 [1942] 544-45).

⁴ Cf. *God and the Ways of Knowing* (New York, 1957) p. 89. Daniélou regards this impasse as a sign that we are here dealing with the mystery of God. It is here suggested that it may also result from the fact that a false problem has been posed.

The immediate result seems to be a destruction of created liberty in any intelligible sense. The Molinist school seeks to include within the eternal planning of God the free determination of the creature by ascribing to God a kind of knowledge by which, prior to all creative activity on His part and (hence) prior to all free activity of the creature, He knows infallibly what the creature would freely choose in any conceivable set of circumstances. Though this point of view contains an important insight into the nature of liberty and its inclusion in the divine plan, the difficulty of grounding and explaining this kind of knowledge has led to a wide proliferation of opinions within the Molinist school. May we not in all sincerity and without disloyalty ask whether both these attempts have not failed to satisfy Christian thinkers generally because both in some sense suppose an inadequate concept of providence, one not securely grounded in divine revelation and the Christian understanding of God's dealings with men?

It has been contended that in the final analysis the Catholic theologian must choose between these two positions, between classical Thomism and strict Molinism.⁵ A position which rejects both intrinsically predetermining decrees and *scientia media* must, it is said, reintroduce *scientia media* in some hidden manner. The reason for this is that the positions are finally contradictory and hence allow no third position. They are contradictory in the way they answer the question "Does God know free futuribles before every absolute divine decree?" Molinists say He does; Bannezians say He does not. But it should be noted that this argument is valid only if it is truly necessary to say God knows the conditioned future free choices of distinct individuals in order to exercise providence over the world. It is this common pre-supposition that is here being re-examined. If it is true that the essential question for a theology of providence is how God knows free futuribles, then unquestionably we must be either classical Thomists or

⁵ "Y a-t-il entre le thomisme classique et le molinisme une position éclectique possible? Pour répondre à cette question, il faut se rappeler que deux propositions contradictoires ne peuvent être en même temps vraies, ni en même temps fausses, l'une est vraie, l'autre est fausse, et il n'y a pas de milieu, de par le principe de contradiction. Or le thomisme classique sur la question qui nous occupe et le molinisme sont contradictoires. Le thomisme dit avant tout décret divin sur les futuribles libres, Dieu ne peut les connaître *infailliblement*; le molinisme au contraire affirme que Dieu peut les connaître *infailliblement*. Il n'y a donc pas de milieu possible entre ces deux doctrines contradictoires" (R. Garrigou-Lagrange, O.P., "Pour l'intelligence du dogme de la providence," *Angelicum* 29 [1952] 249).

strict Molinists. But is this the question? Must the theology of providence be built upon the presupposition of such knowledge?

The second fact, the abuse of created liberty through sin, poses an even more serious difficulty for the simple conception of divine providence outlined above. When the free creature chooses to do something that is contrary to God's will, how can we then speak of a plan of God being put into execution? The reply to this question is usually framed in the context of divine permissions and permissive decrees. Once again, there is undoubtedly much truth here. But what really does it mean? Does God's antecedent permission that a particular moral evil occur mean that in each case this evil will infallibly occur? Are we to understand that by deciding not to impede sin God by that very fact, prior to all evil choice on the part of the creature, writes into His plan not merely the possibility of created failure but the very failure itself? The expostulation of Dom Pontifex seems very justified:

We cannot appeal to mystery to make sense of a contradiction. We cannot say that God is almighty and wills the good of a creature, and yet that the creature's good is not realized, or that a man determines his own choice and yet that he is wholly determined by God, and, when challenged to explain, merely reply that it is a mystery. We must show that the statements do not conflict when rightly understood, or else we must modify one of them in some way. Hence we cannot solve this problem of evil simply by saying that God's purposes are beyond our comprehension, or that evil is due to sin, but that it is a mystery how a creature can misuse his free will, when God is almighty and all-good.⁶

One final difficulty about the ordinary presentation of divine providence as a plan arises from the overriding influence of a particular problem, that of predestination. Providence is normally distinguished into three kinds, according to the objects it considers. There is general providence, concerned with the whole universe and everything that is in it. There is special providence, concerned with intellectual beings, who are ordered to a supernatural end. There is most special providence, or predestination, concerned with those intellectual creatures who *de facto* arrive at the supernatural end. Since the greatest difficulty arises in the last division of providence, it is this which has drawn the most attention and influenced thought in all other areas. The emphasis in the doctrine of predestination is upon the concrete individual

⁶ *Freedom and Providence* (New York, 1960) p. 49.

who attains salvation. This emphasis leads to a neglect of the social or collective aspects of the process by which salvation is achieved, and of salvation itself as actually achieved. This is shown in the neglect for so many centuries of the dogmatic and spiritual aspects of the doctrine on the Church, and in the relative unimportance of the place given the questions of the general judgment, the perfection of the universe, and the heavenly Jerusalem. These collective aspects seem like divine afterthoughts, inescapable but incidental consequences of working out the salvation of many people.

The central difficulty in all these considerations about providence seems to be their lack of any synthetic unity. Any single item taken by itself seems to make a great deal of sense and to contain an important element of truth; but it seems impossible to put them all together in a coherent intellectual whole. It may be that some essential elements of the problem are missing and that any attempt to fit the remaining parts together must for that reason be unsuccessful.

SOME SCRIPTURAL DATA ON PROVIDENCE

It is not possible to develop here the full richness of scriptural evidence relative to our question. It will instead be our purpose to call attention to a number of pertinent biblical themes that are not usually given much prominence, but which seem essential for developing an adequate theology of providence.

It is a commonplace today to observe that the God of the Hebrews is the Lord of history.⁷ Even the earliest patriarchal accounts represent God as operating powerfully and effectively in men's lives in order to accomplish His purposes. He is as powerful in Egypt as in Palestine. The story of Joseph concludes with the observation that even through

⁷ ". . . Israel was little interested in nature, except as God used it together with his historical acts to reveal himself and to accomplish his purpose. Yahweh was the God of history, the living God unaffected by the cycles of nature, who had set himself to accomplish a definite purpose in time. . ." (G. E. Wright, *The Old Testament against Its Environment* [London, 1950] p. 71). On the following page he connects this same view with Israel's election: ". . . Yet Israel could not have arrived at this awareness of the meaning of time apart from her theology of Election. The God who had chosen her had a purpose in mind in doing so, and that purpose he would fulfill. Consequently, history is in movement toward a goal solely because God has determined both the movement and the goal."

man's evil intentions the beneficent intention of God is operative to achieve His own ends.⁸

But as we examine more closely the biblical picture of God's guidance of human history and world events, it seems important to notice that we are confronted with two very different series of texts. One series stresses the *omnipotence and infallibility* of the divine government; the other series expresses what can only be called the *frustration* of God in the face of free human resistance. A classic example of the first series is the following from Second Isaiah: "For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and return not thither but water the earth, making it bring forth and sprout, giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater, so shall my word be that goes forth from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and prosper in the thing for which I sent it."⁹ Many others of this sort could be adduced, but they may be omitted here, since this series of texts is the one most used by theologians to deal with providence.

Examples of the second series of texts can be found readily in both the Old and the New Testaments. God's complaint about the vineyard which yields only wild grapes after He has done for it all that was required for it to produce good grapes is an expression of this frustration.¹⁰ In Ezekiel God speaks of wearying Himself in His efforts to

⁸ "But Joseph said to them, 'Fear not, for am I in the place of God? As for you, you meant evil against me; but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive, as they are today. So do not fear; I will provide for you and your little ones.' Thus he reassured and comforted them" (Gn 50:19-21).

⁹ Is 55:6-13. André Feuillet makes the following observation with regard to the divine plan in Isaiah: "... S'opposant aux plans des politiciens et des guerriers (7:5; 8:10; 19:3, 11; 30:1; 36:5...), Isaïe discerne un *plan de Yahweh* lui-même (7:7 sq.; 8:10; 14:24-27; 19:2; 23:8-9)... Yahweh ne demeure étranger à rien de ce que se passe ici-bas; toujours immanent à l'histoire du monde, à travers elle et par elle c'est *son oeuvre* à lui qu'il poursuit (5:12, 19; 10:12; 28:21; 29:23...); oeuvre qui est un reflet de la sagesse divine (28:23-29), oeuvre adorable en laquelle réside la sainteté divine tout comme dans le temple de Jérusalem (29:23), oeuvre singulière, est-il dit encore, étrange, apparemment absurde, car elle déroute l'orgueil et les ambitions nationalistes (28:21—Dieu qui combat contre son propre peuple!). Rien ne saurait s'opposer à l'accomplissement des desseins divins (5:19; 7:7; 8:10; 9:7—10:4; 14:24 sq.; 19:17), qui s'étendent à l'univers entier: 'C'est la résolution prise pour toutes les nations. Si Yahweh des armées l'a décidé, qui l'empêchera, et si sa main est étendue, qui la détournera?' (14:26-27; cf. aussi 28:22)..." ("Isaïe [le livre d']," *Dict. de la Bible, Supplément 4*, 684).

¹⁰ Is 5:3-4.

purify His people; now in disgust He is determined to punish them without mercy for their continued filthiness.¹¹ In the Gospel Christ laments Jerusalem's failure to respond to His desire that her children be gathered around Him as a brood around a mother hen.¹² And St. Luke writes quite simply that the Pharisees and scribes by refusing to be baptized by John brought to nought God's plan concerning them.¹³

One attempting to give an adequate picture of God's plan of providence must deal honestly with both these series of texts. He must safeguard the omnipotence and infallibility of divine government, but he must show the truth involved in the divine frustration. To neglect this latter aspect is to give a distorted and one-sided picture.

A second theme in the biblical presentation which is of great importance for a correct understanding of providence is the *adaptability* that characterizes God's dealings with men. The human situation, man's response to God's initiative, conditions the way in which God acts in history. George Ernest Wright sees in the present structure of the Books of Genesis an indication of this divine way of acting:

The growth of civilization, therefore, is accompanied by a degeneration of the spirit of man, caused by the human refusal to accept the conditions of creation.

Are we to assume that those who compiled and rewrote these early oral traditions with this view of human history in mind had no answer to the distressing problems they raised? It is entirely likely that the creation and patriarchal traditions once were circulated independently. But the J writer has brought them together, and following the Tower of Babel story we are immediately informed of the election of Abraham. Considering the coherent nature of the J presentation, it is impossible to assume that the two are unrelated. Indeed, the only logical assumption is that the election of Israel in some way must be the answer to the plight of man.¹⁴

This idea of divine adaptability can be seen even in figures of speech which suggest to us at first a certain sovereign fixity of design. On closer examination they reveal a readiness in God to do one thing or another, depending on how men conduct themselves toward Him. The most notable example of this is probably that of the potter. As Jeremiah develops the theme, the potter is pictured as one who can remake a vessel that has been spoiled. Then God announces through His prophet that in like manner, if He has announced the destruction of a nation

¹¹ Ez 24:11-14.

¹² Mt 23:37.

¹³ Lk 7:29-30.

¹⁴ *The Old Testament against Its Environment*, p. 53.

and that nation turns from evil, then He will repent of the evil that He intended to do to it. Similarly, a nation whose prosperity He has promised will not receive the good He intended to give it, if it does evil in His sight and does not listen to His voice.¹⁶ E. Jacob remarks on this passage: "... man is free to such an extent that his conversion can lead God to change His plans."¹⁶ G. E. Wright sums up God's dealings with both the individual and the group in this way:

The popular notion today that individualism did not emerge in Israel until the time of Jeremiah and Ezekiel is a judgment based upon an inadequate comprehension of the data. In the earliest law of the covenant the individual is addressed together with the group, and life achieved its true meaning in the context of God's promise and demand, and of man's faith and obedience.

Furthermore, this sense of relatedness and obligation furnished the means by which the events of life were to be interpreted. The alternation of success and failure, of joy and hate, of happiness and unhappiness, of peace and war, of security and insecurity, could only be understood in relation to God's promise of blessing and cursing, grace and judgment, love and wrath. The nature of God's activity at any immediate moment was conditioned by the nature of man's response. Thus a profound conception of sin as rebellion against God and a breach of the covenant came into being. To this rebellion God's response was one of punishment. Yet a thoroughgoing repentance usually meant that God would also "repent": i.e. He would not then do what previously he had said he would do when the people were in sin. . . .¹⁷

This same adaptability is shown in many passages in Deuteronomy, of which the following is typical: "Behold, I set before you this day a blessing and a curse: the blessing, if you obey the commandments of the Lord your God, which I command you this day, and the curse if you do not obey the commandments of the Lord your God, but turn aside from the way which I command you this day, to go after other gods which you have not known."¹⁸

It is this aspect of adaptability that justifies the following observation of Dr. William Pollard about the biblical idea of providence:

Let us start with the Biblical idea of providence in all its fulness and inquire into what kind of a world we must have and what conditions must be satisfied in order to make this idea valid. When the question is put in this way, we see immediately that it must be a world which is so constituted that its history has at any

¹⁶ Jer 18:1-11.

¹⁶ *Théologie de l'Ancien Testament* (Paris, 1956) p. 165.

¹⁷ *Op. cit.*, pp. 69-70.

¹⁸ Dt 11:26-28.

moment many possibilities open to it. Only in such a world could the course of events be continuously responsible to the will of its Creator.¹⁹

E. Jacob, likewise, in presenting the reality of God's sovereign dominion over history as portrayed in the Old Testament, excludes the notion of history being simply the unfolding of a plan determined on in advance.²⁰ This is the point of view, too, underlying R. Guardini's interpretation of the Isaian prophecies of renewal, and of Israel's rejection of Christ.²¹

The final aspect of the scriptural presentation of providence which seems to deserve special attention is its *collective* or *communal* quality. Both in the end aimed at by God's dominion of the world and in the means ordered to this end, the collective aspect has a clear emphasis in Sacred Scripture. This is very evident in the earliest faith of Israel, before the notion of personal survival after death had assumed definite lines. God's purpose was acknowledged to be operating to achieve a future goal; but this goal was found in the well-being, spiritual and temporal, of the people of God. It was not yet clear what this well-being involved. As the notions of messianic and eschatological salvation developed, once again the collective dimensions of this future well-being remain emphasized.²² The Davidic King would rule

¹⁹ Quoted by John Baillie, *The Sense of the Presence of God* (London, 1962) p. 226.

²⁰ "Yahweh est non seulement un dieu puissant, mais un souverain sage, qui ne laisse de place ni au dualisme, ni au hasard: tout est provoqué et voulu par lui (Amos 3, 6; Es. 47, 7; Lam. 3, 37), ce qui ne veut pas dire que l'histoire n'est que le déroulement d'un plan déterminé à l'avance, car Yahweh tient dans sa main les destinées des hommes, non à la manière d'un jouer de marionnettes, mais en leur laissant la liberté de décision; aussi l'histoire a-t-elle toujours l'aspect d'un drame où les deux protagonistes, Dieu et les hommes, s'appellent, se fuient, pour finalement se réconcilier" (*op. cit.*, p. 153).

²¹ "... As far as God was concerned, Isaiah's prophecy of the new existence stood ready to become reality . . . Such then, the kingdom that would have come if Christ's message had found belief—belief not only of a few individuals, but of the nation that had bound itself to God in the covenant of Sinai. Those in authority: the high priests and the Sanhedrin, the scribes and doctors of the faith should have accepted this belief; when they failed to do so, it was up to the people to thrust them aside and proclaim their faith for themselves. Instead, Christ was rejected by his entire race; so he turned elsewhere—to death . . ." (*The Lord* [Chicago, 1954] pp. 95–96).

²² "Yahweh, c'est encore le Roi (6:5) du monde entier (cf. O. Eisfeldt, *Jahwe als König, Zeitsch. für alttestam. Wissensch.*, 1928, p. 81 sq.): les seraphins contemplant, pour ainsi dire à l'avance, ce qui est le but du gouvernement divin du monde: la terre remplie de la 'gloire' divine et attestant par là la seigneurie et le souverain dominion de Dieu sur toute chose (6:3; cf. 4:26; 28:1–6 . . .)" (Feuillet, *op. cit.*, col. 684). "Le jugement n'est que la

His people in justice and peace and mercy. When personal survival and its relation to God's consummating judgment became explicit, this did not shift the center of emphasis from the collectivity to the individual. Rather, it simply became clear that the individual was invited to participate in the common good of the whole which the divine mercy was in process of achieving.

The New Testament continues the same emphasis on future collective or social aspects of God's purpose. The day of judgment and divine retribution is, above all, the day of Christ's second coming when He will complete the work given Him by the Father and hand over the kingdom to Him, so that God will be all in all.²³ It is not that this kingdom is an inevitable but incidental consequence of having many individuals attain salvation. Rather, the constitution of the kingdom is primary; the individual by his fidelity to God's call can guarantee his entrance into this kingdom.²⁴

Not only is the end primarily a collective reality, but the means leading to its realization are presented primarily in collective terms. The chosen people are the bearers of God's purpose. Here the theology of "the remnant" is most important. The remnant of Israel, whether numerically few or many, is the group who remain faithful to God and in whom the divine promises and purposes are being fulfilled. The remnant is indeed God's work; for other nations may be destroyed without a trace, but Israel, by God's power, will never be without some who keep alive the destiny committed to them.²⁵

In the New Testament it is the Church, the Body of Christ, the new Israel, that is the divinely guaranteed means for achieving the end of

phase préliminaire de l'exécution du plan divin, qui vise un but essentiellement *positif et salutaire*: le règne pacifique de Yahweh, en premier lieu sur son peuple (4:2 sq.; 32:1 sq. et 28:5-6); en second lieu sur le monde entier: en définitive tout converge vers ce but; Yahweh seul exalté au dessus de tout dans un monde rempli de sa gloire (6:3; 2)" (*ibid.*, col. 687).

²³ Cf. 1 Cor 15:24-28.

²⁴ "Therefore, brethren, be the more zealous to make your call and election firm, for if you do this you will never fall; so there will be richly provided for you an entry into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ" (2 Pt 1:10-11).

²⁵ "... Comme dans Amos, la même justice divine atteint dans Isaïe le peuple choisi et les nations, avec une différence toutefois: tandis que celles-ci peuvent être détruites complètement sans laisser de 'restes' (14:30; 23:13b; cf. cependant 16:14), le peuple dépositaire des promesses messianiques ne saurait disparaître tout à fait: un 'reste' au moins se convertira à Yahweh et sera sauvé (1:9; 4:2-3; 6:13; 7:3, 22; 10:21, 22; 17:4-6; 28:5; 30:17; 37:31)" (Feuillet, *op. cit.*, col. 686).

God's merciful design. Through incorporation in the community of believers one gains fellowship with God and with His Son Jesus Christ.²⁶ It is for this reason that charity or *agapē* is the principal dynamic force in us that leads to the fulfilment of God's purposes; for charity both links individuals to the end and unites them to one another in a single community or fellowship in the Holy Spirit.

One Pauline expression for designating the effective or realized intention of God with respect to men is predestination. But it does not have the later connotation of distinct individuals eternally marked out for everlasting salvation. Its object is the community of Christians, the Church, which as a body will unfailingly be glorified in heaven. Lagrange remarked many years ago:

Ou plutôt Paul n'envisage pas la destinée particulière de chaque fidèle dans les desseins de Dieu, mais les desseins de Dieu sur le christianisme, ceux qui sont en scène sont les fidèles comme groupe, ceux qui ont répondu à son appel, qui ont cru, qui ont été baptisés et qui par conséquent ont reçu la justice. De la part des fidèles tout est censé s'être passé comme il faut, parce qu'il s'agit de la communauté; c'est ce groupe qui formera l'assemblée des frères du Christ. Dieu fera certainement son oeuvre. Quant aux particuliers, c'est à eux de vivre selon l'Esprit, etc. car Paul ne leur a pas dissimulé qu'ils pouvaient retomber dans le régime de la chair. S'il n'en parle ici c'est que son but est de tracer le programme de la bonté divine par rapport aux chrétiens.²⁷

Those whom St. Paul speaks of as called by God and hence predestined to become conformed to Christ in glory (Rom 8:28-29) are simply the members of the Church.²⁸ God's intention has been effective in them

²⁶ Cf. 1 Jn 1:3.

²⁷ *Épître aux Romains* (Paris, 1950) p. 217. Further on he remarks with regard to Rom 9: "Ainsi donc la question traitée directement par Paul n'est pas du tout celle de la prédestination et de la réprobation, mais uniquement de l'appel des gentils à la grâce du christianisme, ayant pour antithèse l'incrédulité des Juifs. Mais il est incontestable que cet appel est en même temps un appel au salut . . . On ne peut donc pas appliquer sans précaution à la prédestination éternelle et à la réprobation ce que est dit de l'appel à la grâce du christianisme" (*op. cit.*, pp. 246-47). Kalt summed the matter up this way: "Das Ziel der Vorherbestimmung der Auserwählten ist somit die Christusgemeinschaft in ihrer höchsten und ewigen Vollendung" (Edmund Kalt, *Der Römerbrief*, [Die Heilige Schrift 14; Freiburg, 1937], comment on Rom 8:30).

²⁸ "From the context it would seem that the *κλητοί* are primarily those who were called to faith and grace, and indirectly those who were called to glory in heaven. Paul means that those who love God and who therefore have been called to grace, are, speaking generally, sure of attaining salvation. Verse 29 makes it clear that Paul regards salvation as normally implied in the call to faith and grace" (Patrick Boylan, *St. Paul's Epistle to the Romans* [Dublin, 1934] p. 148).

thus far, and will assuredly and infallibly be realized in them as a group eternally, even though individual Christians may fall away. The transfer of Paul's thought and terminology to a directly and immediately individual eschatology can easily obscure his meaning.

To sum up: the biblical concept of providence, while it presents us clearly with a view of God as the Lord of history, whose plan will be *infallibly* realized, at the same time has room for *frustration*, not indeed of the whole plan, but of details and sections of it. These frustrations do not, however, thwart God's ultimate purpose, but are made rather to serve that purpose. This points up the *adaptability* of God's plan. It is not simply a kind of play composed before all time and acted out by creatures; it is a drama or composition where everything, no matter how spontaneous or even contrary to God's intention, is reduced to unity and order by God as an almighty improviser, for whom nothing, not even sin, is an absolute obstruction. Finally, the end aimed at by God's providence as well as the means adapted for achieving it should be thought of rather in *collective* and social terms than in individual and isolated terms. The individual is not lost sight of nor swallowed up in an impersonal collectivity; but the emphasis is on his integration into a community of love and life, not upon his individual glorification, with this community as a secondary thing.

THE TEACHING OF THE MAGISTERIUM

The teaching authority of the Church has had relatively little to say about divine providence.²⁹ We may say in general that it has been concerned to preserve both the fact of God's supreme rule over the world of creatures and the genuine liberty of man within that rule. The early dualist errors which challenged both these truths were condemned by the Church, as we see in the case of the Priscillianist teachings.³⁰ The fierce theological debates that developed in the eighth and ninth centuries between the rigid Augustinians and those who preferred a somewhat less uncompromising statement on predestination were resolved in the end by general agreement on a formula which placed both good and evil as found in the world under the dominion of God, the former as done by Him, the latter as justly permitted by

²⁹ Cf. F. Jansen, "La divine providence," *Nouvelle revue théol.* 60 (1933) 97-116.

³⁰ Denzinger-Schönmetzer (*DS*) 459.

Him when there is question of sin.³¹ The same kind of distinction can be seen in the profession of faith sent by Pope St. Leo IX to Peter, Patriarch of Antioch, in 1053, wherein he affirms his belief that God has predestined only what is good, but that He foresees both what is good and what is evil. He adds that the grace of God both precedes and follows man, but in such wise as not to deny free choice to the rational creature.³²

In the twelfth century Abelard was condemned for restricting God's control of evil in the world,³³ and in the following century the profession of faith prescribed by Innocent III for the Waldensians being received back into the Church contained an article affirming the universality of God's providence, governing and disposing all things, corporal and spiritual, visible and invisible.³⁴ One can see here Innocent's preoccupation with Albigensian errors.

Subsequently, in ecumenical councils, the Church added a few further precisions. The Council of Constance rejected a proposition derived from Wycliffe's works that all things happen by absolute necessity.³⁵ The Council of Trent insisted, against certain statements of the Reformers, that it is in the power of man to make his ways evil, and that God does not effect evil in the same way as good, but permissively only.³⁶ It further taught that man is capable of resisting the very grace that is actually leading him to justification.³⁷ The First Vatican Council solemnly affirmed the fact and the scope of divine providence without entering into detail: "God by His providence cares for and governs all that He has made, 'reaching from end to end mightily and disposing all things sweetly.' 'For all things are naked and open to His eyes,' even those which are future by the free action of creatures."³⁸

Beyond these few but important indications of the nature of providence, the teaching authority of the Church has had very little to say.³⁹ God cares for, disposes, and governs all things that He has made. He predestines whatever is good, and justly permits whatever is evil where

³¹ "In caelo et in terra omnia quaecumque voluit Deus, fecit" (Ps 134:6). "Nihil enim in caelo vel in terra fit, nisi quod ipse Deus aut propitius facit (si agitur de bono), aut fieri iuste permittit (si agitur de peccato)" (Conc. Tusiacum, an. 860 [PL 126, 123]).

³² DS 685. ³³ DS 727. ³⁴ DS 790. ³⁵ DS 1177. ³⁶ DS 1556. ³⁷ DS 1525. ³⁸ DS 3003.

³⁹ Some further references, e.g., are found in Pius IX's *Syllabus of Errors* (DS 2901-2) and in Leo XIII's *Libertas humana* (DS 3251).

there is question of sin, it being in the power of man to make his own ways evil. Man in his activity is not subject to necessitating forces, whether these be considered as the stars and hostile powers of evil or as the grace of God, without which, however, he neither can nor does accomplish any salutary good.

A POSITIVE ANSWER

In the light of the scriptural teaching outlined earlier and of the declarations of the magisterium just reviewed, I should like to propose a positive answer to the question "In what sense is God's providence a plan?" This answer endeavors also to take account of the requirements of an existentially oriented philosophy and of the universal belief of Catholics, i.e., of what is actually taught and believed throughout the Church, in distinction to what has remained largely a domestic debate among professional theologians, leaving both the Church teaching and the Church taught relatively unaffected.

It seems to me we can distinguish three moments in the formation of the plan of divine providence. The first moment, coinciding with the divine intention to create rather than not create, is concerned with the created purpose which God absolutely and eternally decides to achieve.⁴⁰ Note that we speak here of the *created* purpose of God, the special way in which He intends to embody the participation of His uncreated goodness. The second moment is concerned with an antecedent divine plan for achieving this created purpose. The third and final moment regards the consequent divine plan, eternally and immutably willed by God and actually being realized in time.

The First Moment: The Divine Purpose

At times some have spoken as if creating involved even for God an element of risk, the possibility that what He ultimately intends in the created order might not be achieved. Such a view seems quite incom-

⁴⁰ I should not want to insist greatly on the distinction between the first and second moments described here, lest there be given an appearance of a discursus in the mind of God, who in one and the same act wills both the end and the things that are ordered to the end. This is especially true inasmuch as the first and second moments described here are both naturally antecedent to all created being and activity. But since the end is primary and what is ordered to the end secondary in willing, we may distinguish these moments for purposes of clearer discussion.

patible with the data of revelation: God is the Lord whose plan and purpose will certainly be realized. We must, however, be careful how we formulate this purpose in concrete terms, or we are liable to set for ourselves a false and hence insoluble problem. Scripture, as we have observed, and St. Thomas, also, speak of this final created concrete purpose of God in *collective* terms: the heavenly Jerusalem, the perfection of the universe to be found in the order of the blessed.⁴¹ This, it seems to me, should be set down as God's ultimate purpose to be realized in creation: a society of supernaturally-elevated created persons united to one another and to the Holy Trinity in vision, love, and joy. The divine intention of the end as considered in this first moment is not directly concerned with determining the precise individuals who will finally constitute this society of the blessed: it is simply concerned that such a society shall indeed exist.

We should perhaps add with St. Thomas that this intention regards the dimensions of this heavenly city, how many persons will actually be saved.⁴² But such a determination of a number seems to me best considered simply as a decision about a minimum.⁴³ Perhaps, also, we should include here the intention of the Incarnation, that this society be the glorified Mystical Body of Christ. But this may be disputed, since it depends on the question of the motive for the Incarnation: simply man's redemption from sin, or the general purpose of the communication of supernatural life, independently of whether man should sin or not. But apart from such considerations, the thing which seems to me to be most significant at this stage is that God's purpose regards primarily a social and collective good, a society of persons en-

⁴¹ "... Deus ex nihilo universas creaturas in esse produicens, primam universi perfectionem, quae consistit in partibus essentialibus universi, et diversis speciebus, per seipsum instituit. Ad ultimam vero perfectionem, quae erit ex consummatione ordinis beatorum, ordinavit diversos motus et operationes creaturarum" (*De potentia*, q. 5, a. 5, ad 13m). Cf. also *Sum. theol.* 1, q. 73, a. 1.

⁴² "Praeordinavit enim [Deus] in qua mensura deberet esse totum universum, et quis numerus esset conveniens essentialibus partibus universi" (*Sum. theol.* 1, q. 23, a. 7). St. Thomas himself is here directly concerned with the predestination of definite individuals, a matter which is taken up only later in our present discussion; the principle, however, seems applicable.

⁴³ Speaking of the number of angels, St. Thomas wrote: "Oportet quod nobiliora, quasi propter se existantia, multiplicentur quantum possibile est" (*C. gent.* 2, 92, 7). It seems to me that the same principle holds with regard to the number of the saved, though Thomas never drew this conclusion himself.

joying participated divine life. This purpose is absolute, unfailing, prior to all vision of actual created activity and individual persons actually existing. This end of divine providence has then a certitude which derives ultimately from God alone, from His love and wisdom and power.

The Second Moment: The Antecedent Plan of God

It is a commonplace to speak of a first and second plan of God.⁴⁴ The second plan is sometimes presented as a kind of revision of the first plan, a way of ensuring that what seemed thwarted in the first plan should nevertheless be achieved.⁴⁵ But on reflection it is clear that we cannot properly speak of a "revision" of God's plan, as if something happened not provided for by God, some kind of surprise that caught Him unawares and necessitated a hasty tidying-up of His plans. Rather, the first or antecedent plan of God is totally comprehensive, embracing and making objectively real all possibilities He wishes to be possible within the universe of creatures. The second or consequent plan of God, as will be indicated below more in detail, is contained within this antecedent plan as the intelligibility of the possibilities which are not only objectively really possible, but are actually being existentially realized.

⁴⁴ "Cum igitur voluntas Dei sit universalis causa omnium rerum, impossibile est quod divina voluntas suum effectum non consequatur. Unde quod recedere videtur a divina voluntate secundum unum ordinem, relabitur in ipsam secundum alium; sicut peccator, qui quantum est in se, recedit a divina voluntate peccando, incidit in ordinem divinae voluntatis, dum per eius iustitiam punitur" (*Sum. theol.* 1, q. 19, a. 6). Cf. also *De ver.*, q. 5, a. 7.

⁴⁵ For example: "In order to grasp fundamentally the Immaculate Conception, we must return to the original plan of the Creator. 'God created us,' says St. Paul, 'to be saints, to be blameless in His sight' (Eph 1:4). Through sin, man spoilt that divine plan, but God was not thereby thwarted in resuming his primary purpose, and he willed to transform his spoilt work into a new creation, of which Mary is the anticipation and the complete realization . . ." (L.-J. Suenens, *Mary the Mother of God* [New York, 1959] p. 30). And again: ". . . He [the sacred writer of the first chapters of Genesis] uses the naive scientific knowledge of his time merely as means to bring out certain religious truths, to propose to his contemporaries some events happening in the beginning in order to show forth God's omnipotence over all creation and His special providence over man, the complete dependence of man on his Creator, and man's tragic resistance to God. The story that unfolds is one of promise and salvation. Although compromised by sin, the divine plan eternally envisioned will yet be brought to success" (Cyril Vollert, S.J., "Evolution and the Bible," in *Symposium on Evolution* [Pittsburgh, 1959] pp. 86-87).

The antecedent plan of God is directed to the achievement of His purpose: the society of the blessed. This antecedent plan not only foresees all possible contingencies within the world of created beings issuing from God's hand, but is what makes these contingencies possible. God wills according to this plan that certain things be objectively and truly possible within the created world. Not all of these possibilities will be realized as actual events or things, but they are all truly possible. Furthermore, God according to this antecedent plan determines how He will direct every possibility to the realization of His purpose, should this possibility become an actuality.⁴⁶

This is the stage of the universal salvific will of God, where God truly and sincerely wills the salvation of every person He calls into existence. He provides means abundantly sufficient to make this salvation truly possible in every individual case. Each created person is invited to membership in the society of the blessed. No one is excluded. Scheeben refers to this, too, as a kind of predestination, a plan for the salvation of everyone, and he places here the center of the mystery of God's saving love:

The divine will to save, according to the unanimous teaching of all Catholic theologians, is twofold: on the one hand it is universal, and refers to all men, even

⁴⁶ It is generally said that there is in God only "regnative" prudence, directing the actions of others to the end, and not "monastic" prudence, directing His own actions. E.g.: "... Furthermore, human providence is of two kinds: that by which a person ordains his acts well to the end of life and that by which a person ordains the acts of his subjects to a common end. It is only in this second way that prudence and human providence may be suitably compared to God's providence, for God is His own 'end' and consequently there is nothing in Him that can be ordained to an end [Cf. *Sum. theol.* 1, q. 22, a. 1]" (W. L. Ysaac, "The Certitude of Providence in St. Thomas," *Modern Schoolman* 38 [1961] 317). But since the antecedent plan of God includes how God will act to direct things to the achievement of His purpose as well as how things themselves can act, this plan can in a certain sense be said to involve monastic as well as regnative prudence. For while it is true that God is the end and hence cannot properly be said to order Himself or His actions to the end (in the strict sense of monastic prudence), still He plans how His own actions will direct others to the end according to their condition. Joseph Collins, O.P., wrote in this connection concerning God's monastic prudence in applying the natural law: "... Not only does God make the law and impose it on creatures; this is an act of regnative prudence in Him. At every stage, He must also assist His creatures to carry out the law. In the case of irrational creatures God makes the application of the law to each particular action. In the case of rational creatures, who are free, He pre-moves them and cooperates with them in making the application of the law to themselves. Hence, where God is concerned, an act of monastic prudence is always required to direct creatures according to the law" ("God's Eternal Law," *Thomist* 23 [1960] 508).

those who, as a matter of fact, fail to achieve salvation; on the other hand, it is particular, and refers to those who actually reach their foreordained end.

Ordinarily, when God's will to save is designated as predestination, it is only this latter sense, to the exclusion of the former, that is understood. Hence predestination is taken to mean the divine decree whereby men are effectively brought to their end. Accordingly the mystery is placed at that point which marks off the particular, effective salvific will from the universal salvific will. We are of the opinion that the universal salvific will, too, can and must be called predestination, and that the center of gravity of the mystery is found therein, for the reason that it is the root and kernel of the particular salvific will. If this turns out to be the case, the light shining in the heart of the mystery will illuminate us with rays of uncommon brilliance.⁴⁷

We must also add that the means of salvation provided by the antecedent plan of God, which are abundantly sufficient for the salvation of everyone, are antecedently infallibly effective for the salvation of some, but of which ones in particular is not yet determined. In other words, the means provided are infallibly effective in the group as a whole. They exclude no one nor (except perhaps for certain exceptions made for the good of the whole) do they definitely and certainly include any particular individuals. This idea can be illustrated by an example taken from the natural order, which the supernatural order resembles and perfects. We even as human beings have antecedent infallible certitude that, unless some unforeseen cataclysm befalls the world, the human race will be in existence two hundred years from now. No one now alive will be here then, but the collective reality of mankind will still be in existence. We know this to be the case because we know that the means for guaranteeing the continued existence of the race are infallibly effective in the group, even though they may not be in each individual case. The instinct of sex, self-preservation, and parental care are so strong in human nature that although each individual is free not to act according to them, and although many individuals will choose not to act according to them, there is not the slightest, remotest possibility that everyone will as a matter of fact choose not to act according to them. Though these drives do respect individual liberty, still when we consider their effect in the group as a whole we are able to predict with considerable accuracy such things as the number of marriages that will be performed next year, though each one involved is quite certain that he or she is acting

⁴⁷ *Mysteries of Christianity* (St. Louis, 1946) p. 702.

freely, and we, for our part, are not able to tell ahead of time which individuals will get married. There is thus in the total group as such an intelligibility that is not found in the individuals isolated from one another and merely added together. This intelligibility is founded on the nature of human liberty as something not absolutely unconditioned and upon the forces acting everywhere to condition the exercise of this liberty.

It does not seem necessary to suppose that God's antecedent plan, which prior to all vision of the created world is able to achieve God's purpose infallibly, is infallible in any sense essentially different from this. The end, which is collective, is absolutely willed; the means, which likewise are collective, are, *as collective*, infallibly effective. It is here, too, that the essential truth of the Molinist insight with regard to a kind of "middle knowledge" seems verified. In order to establish a doctrine of providence, we need not affirm that this knowledge reaches to the individual futurible free acts of individual created persons; but it does know infallibly, before all absolute divine decrees, how free creatures as a whole will respond to grace, to God's personal invitation extended to each of them to enter the society of the blessed. Not all will refuse. There will always be a remnant in whom the divine purpose is being realized.⁴⁸

The eternal law also belongs to this antecedent plan of divine providence.⁴⁹ By reason of the eternal law, certain activities are not only

⁴⁸ It is instructive to note how even those who approach this matter first from the standpoint of the divine effectiveness in individual cases are led to recognize the prior importance of the general aspect. This then leads them to make distinctions which are not wholly satisfactory and are, in our approach, unnecessary: "Si nous considérons chacune en particulier, il est bien évident que Dieu peut la gouverner d'une façon tout à fait conforme à sa contingence sans permettre qu'elle défaille: car elle peut ne pas défaillir. Mais si nous considérons l'ensemble de ces natures contingentes—et la providence générale de Dieu les considère dans leur ensemble,—nous pressentons que Dieu ne peut pas les gouverner ainsi sans que soit supprimée leur contingence: elle demeurerait attachée à leur nature, mais ne passerait pas dans leur opération. En effet, elles ne pourraient pas de fait se comporter autrement qu'elles ne font, leur opération revêtirait un caractère de nécessité,—non pas au sens où nécessaire s'oppose à libre, mais au sens où il s'oppose à la contingence de défectibilité . . ." (J.-H. Nicolas, O.P., "La permission du péché," *Revue thomiste* 60 [1960] 541).

⁴⁹ The following paragraph represents the conclusions arrived at by Joseph Collins, O.P., in his article "God's Eternal Law," referred to earlier: "To bring things into being, something more was required on the part of God than the mere decision to create. His providence, which is an act of monastic prudence, gave a command to His executive powers to

possible but are in some sense necessary, either physically or, in the case of deliberate acts of free creatures, morally. Other actions, while remaining physically possible, are forbidden. Moral necessity or obligation manifests the intention of God with regard to those actions that are by their nature apt to promote God's ultimate purpose and whose omission sets the agent on a course away from this end.⁵⁰

It should be noted that while both commanded and forbidden lines of conduct are possible, their possibility is immediately derived from radically different sources. Ultimately, of course, their possibility is from God in both cases. But in the case of evil and forbidden acts, their possibility comes immediately from the defectibility of the free creature, a condition that is naturally inseparable from its status as a creature, as one made from nothing.⁵¹ In the case of good and commanded acts, their possibility comes from the creative intention of God, positively manifested in the nature of the creature and in the

call things into being that did not exist before. In the actual production of creatures the divine art came into play. As an artist is guided by the idea which he has in his mind, so in the production of individual things God was guided by the ideas of them in the divine mind, but He disposed them in a certain order in relation to one another and with a view to the end. Since, however, the ordering of things in relation to an end is the special function of providence, the original disposition of creatures in the universe is also attributed to providence. In this passage [*De ver.*, q. 5, a. 1] St. Thomas would seem to assign to providence and to disposition what we have assigned to eternal law. There is no contradiction in this, when we remember that in the domain of regnative prudence there is a providence which is an integral part of the eternal law. The eternal law, with a view to the common good of the universe, lays down in a general way what *disposition* and *providence* carry into effect in the sphere of monastic prudence. Moreover, whatever can be attributed to providence as a conclusion, may also be attributed to the eternal law as the premise from which the conclusion was drawn" (*art. cit.*, p. 532). See also pp. 507 and 509 for further remarks on the relationship between providence and eternal law.

⁵⁰ J.-H. Nicolas remarks that the manifestation of the divine will causes an obligation in us, but does not always show what God actually wants. This is an oversubtle distinction if it wishes to say there is no objectively real sense in which He actually wills what He commands. But He does not always will it by a consequent and absolute will which achieves its result. Fr. Nicolas writes: "... Quand nous sommes en présence d'une manifestation de la volonté divine, nous disons encore: c'est le signe que Dieu veut la chose qu'il manifeste vouloir; quand Dieu dit à tout homme: 'Tu aimeras le Seigneur,' nous disons qu'il veut que tout homme l'aime. Or c'est une métaphore, car ce que est signe d'une cause en nous [obligation], n'est pas toujours signe de la même cause en Dieu" (*art. cit.*, p. 520).

⁵¹ "Le mal moral est rendu possible dès qu'il y a des créatures libres: on peut donc dire qu'à la volonté de créer des êtres libres est attachée une permission générale du péché" (*ibid.*, p. 540). See also pp. 543-44, where he again connects the permission to sin with the innate defectibility of the created free agent.

orientation of its powers of action toward the good. As a result of this (if we may anticipate for a moment the consequent plan of God), God is the first cause of the good actions that actually come about. The creature is the first cause of the defect in the evil actions that actually come about. It should be noted, finally, that the divine permission of evil, understood as God's making an evil a possibility and not positively and absolutely hindering its realization, does not of itself mean that such an evil will as a matter of fact come to be. The permission of evil in the antecedent plan of God should not be confused with the permissive decree of evil in the consequent plan.⁵²

The antecedent plan of God comprehends also what are spoken of as the conditioned decrees of God. These should be understood as *objectively* conditioned, i.e., involving conditions whose fulfilment depends on the free determination of the creature. It is this which gives the character of adaptability to the plan of God and forbids us, as Jacques Maritain has pointed out, from understanding providence as a scenario written before all time to be acted out by creatures.⁵³ These conditional decrees of God actually comprehend all the possibilities which He wishes to exist within the universe. Hence, no matter what the free determination of the creature may be, God has antecedently determined what will be its result, how it will fit into the build-

⁵² "There are two divine permissions without which evil would never reach existence. One is the permission of the *possibility* of evil, enveloped in advance in the frustrability of what we have called the shatterable divine impetus which created liberty, if it so wills, is able to render sterile. The other is the permission for the *effectuation* of evil, once created liberty has already nihilated in fact, but without having as yet acted (in that moment of non-consideration of the rule which precedes the evil option)" J. Maritain, *Existence and the Existent* [New York, 1957] p. 117). He adds in a footnote on the same page: "Here, in the permission for the effectuation of evil, is situated the notion of permissive decree (including the permission that the general motion which activates the whole physical order be not withheld from the physical content of the evil act)." Nicolas, though not sharing Maritain's conception of a shatterable divine impulse, does admit the same distinction of two senses of "permission of evil" (cf. *art. cit.*, pp. 525-26).

⁵³ "The divine plan is not a scenario prepared in advance, in which free subjects would play parts and act as performers. We must purge our thought of any idea of a play written in advance, at a time prior to time—a play in which time unfolds, and the characters of time read the parts. On the contrary, everything is improvised, under the eternal and immutable direction of the Almighty Stage Manager" (J. Maritain, *op. cit.*, p. 122). Romano Guardini, as we saw above (n. 21), applies this concept to the events even of our Lord's life and death.

ing up of the heavenly Jerusalem, what will be the divine and efficacious judgment upon the free creaturely response to the divine initiative.⁵⁴

It is clear that it is the antecedent plan of God that allows us to speak of the frustration of God's designs. Something which falls under the divine plan as directly ordered to the achievement of His purpose does not come to be because of the permitted free resistance of the creature. This free resistance will be made somehow to serve God's ultimate purpose, but of itself it does not do this.⁵⁵ For this reason we can understand how Pope Pius XII could distinguish between the absolute certitude with which the end intended by God will be realized and the incertitude of some means directed to that end.⁵⁶ These latter

⁵⁴ E. Schillebeeckx, O.P., has called attention to a particularly striking example of this divine adaptability: "... For though God himself did not invent suffering and death, and although it is to be reckoned to the account of sin's sentence of doom, still God from the very beginning has caught up suffering and death in his providence. He converts the very consequences of evil itself into the certain means of salvation..." ("The Death of a Christian," in *The Layman in the Church and Other Essays* [Staten Island, N.Y., 1963] p. 82). Philippe de la Trinité, O.C.D., in his essay "Notre liberté devant Dieu," agrees with Maritain in rejecting a "scenario" concept of providence. He insists on the existential and present aspects of the divine plan and its realization. He differs with both Molinism and Bannezianism on the knowability of a purely "futurible sin." But he admits an "existential futurible sin" on account of the existing voluntary resistance to God's grace, which resistance God can overcome without violating man's liberty by a more abundant grace. Cf. *art. cit.*, in *Structures et liberté (Etudes carmélitaines)*; Paris, 1958) pp. 47-76.

⁵⁵ "The Christian doctrine of providence teaches that the whole of history stands under the ultimate divine control. This does not mean that the Christian is able to trace the working of God's hand in it all, but that he can trace it in some events which have become what we have called paradigmatic for him, having what Whitehead called an 'elucidatory power' which casts light on all the rest. Nor does it mean that all that happens is the result of God's direct ruling, so that no room would be left for the free action of his creatures, but rather that he can and does so 'over-rule' these as to make them subservient to his own ultimate purpose.... God has something to do with all that is done in his world, though assuredly much is done that is not in accord with his will. This [over-ruling] may sound to some mysterious doctrine, yet if things did not stand thus, it is difficult to see how God could be in ultimate control of any event, since even his most cherished designs might be frustrated by some one thing in his universe that was wholly outside his control" (John Baillie, *The Sense of the Presence of God* [London, 1962] pp. 225-26).

⁵⁶ "Di questa lotta è già assicurato l'esito finale, essendone garante l'infallibile parola di Dio. Verrà il giorno del trionfo.... Ma vi sono battaglie, il cui esito non è certo, perchè è affidato anche alla buona volontà degli uomini. In alcuni settori il 'nemico' ha prevalso; occorre riconquistare il terreno perduto—cioè le anime traviate—perchè Gesù regni nuovamente nei cuori e nel mondo" (*Discorsi e radiomessaggi di Sua Santità, Pio XII* 15 [Vatican City, 1953] 506).

can often fail to be realized because of our lack of co-operation and industry.

The Third Moment: The Consequent Plan of God

The second or consequent plan of God is the intelligible order of the existing universe to the end as that order exists in the intelligence of God, and is communicated by Him to the universe according to the decrees of His will. What at once distinguishes and unites the antecedent and the consequent plans of God is the free determinations of creatures within the antecedent plan of God. All the force, power, goodness, mercy, and gratuity that is to be found in the second or consequent plan of God is already virtually present in the antecedent plan of God.⁵⁷ Because the divine eternity supercomprehends the whole temporal order, all the free determinations of creatures are eternally present to God.⁵⁸ It is in this way that the choices of free creatures actually enter into the eternal plan of God.⁵⁹ Thus the insight of Molina that this is the case is preserved, though not in the same way. For we

⁵⁷ It is this which guarantees the transcendence and immutability of God. Prestige observes this in the teaching of the Fathers: "[God is] impassible and unalterable, says Methodius (*de creatione* 4.1), and proceeds to defend the position that the act of creation involved no change in the being of God Himself. It is clear that impassibility means not that God is inactive or uninterested, not that He surveys existence with Epicurean impassivity from the shelter of metaphysical insulation, but that His will is determined from within instead of being swayed from without. It safeguards the truth that the impulse alike in providential order and in redemption and sanctification comes from the will of God. If it were possible to admit that the impulse was wrung from Him either by the needs or by the claims of His creation, and that thus whether by pity or by justice His will was forced, He could no longer be represented as absolute; He would be dependent on the created universe and thus at least only in possession of concurrent power. Any such view leads straight to Manichean dualism. But in that case God ceases to be the ground of all existence, *τὸ ὅν*" (*God in Patristic Thought* [London, 1959] p. 7).

⁵⁸ "... And it is by virtue of the eternal presence of time in eternity (even before time was), by virtue of the embrace, by the eternal instant, of history in the making (perpetually fresh in its newness and indeed—as regards free acts—in its unforeseeability) that the divine plan is immutably fixed in heaven from all eternity, directing history towards the ends willed by God and disposing towards those ends all the actors in the drama and all the good God causes in them, while taking advantage, on behalf of those ends, of the evil itself of which they are the nihilating first cause and which God permits without having caused it" (Maritain, *op. cit.*, p. 123).

⁵⁹ "... Let no one say that man alters the eternal plan! That would be an absurdity. Man does not alter it. He enters into its very composition and its eternal fixity by his power of saying, No!" (*ibid.*, p. 125).

are concerned here not with the possible choices of creatures, nor with their conditioned free decisions, but with the actual choices they do as a matter of fact make.⁶⁰

The will of God, His creative power, thus acts to realize in the world that aspect of His antecedent plan that is according to the free decision of the creatures He has made and endowed with the power of free choice. This aspect of the antecedent plan is the consequent plan of God, His eternal, immutable plan according to which He actually governs the universe and leads it infallibly to the end.⁶¹

Maritain restricts this power of the creature to enter into the formation of the eternal plan to the creature's power to say no to God, to its power to fail, to make that which is nothing.⁶² And unquestionably, it is here alone that the creature has an ultimate initiative, and hence here

⁶⁰ Ysaac remarks with regard to St. Thomas' later view of providence: "... In other words, divine providence is no longer conceived as an essentialistic, formalistic divine concept of natures as ordered to one another and to an essentialized and formalized divine goodness as ultimate end but has become for St. Thomas the divine notion of the whole existing and changing multitude of distinct finite beings insofar as these are understood and willed in the intelligible actual unity and actual value of their total ordination to their ultimate end. Hence, the certitude of this notion is not merely in the order of first acts, that is, of forms, essences, and natures, which can hardly account for a dynamic universe shot through with contingency. Rather it is, first and foremost, a certitude in the order of second acts, grasped by the pure act of divine understanding in a single view as a complete and determinately ordered totality" (*op. cit.*, p. 319).

⁶¹ "It depends solely upon ourselves to shatter them [divine activations] by making, upon our own deficient initiative, that thing called nothing (or by nihilating). But if we have not budged, if we have done nothing, that is to say, if we have introduced no nothingness and no *non*; if we allow free passage to these influxes of being, then (*and by virtue of the first design of God* [emphasis added]) the shatterable divine activations fructify by themselves into the unshatterable divine activation. This unshatterable divine activation is none other than the decisive *fiat*, received in us. By Its *fiat* the transcendent Cause makes that to happen which It wills . . ." (Maritain, *op. cit.*, pp. 100-101).

⁶² "We must say that in a certain fashion those creatures have their part in the very establishment of the eternal plan, not, indeed, by virtue of their power to act (here all they have they hold of God) but by virtue of their power to nihilate, to make the thing that is nothing, where they themselves are first causes. Free existents have their part in the establishment of God's plan, because in establishing that plan, He takes account of their initiatives of nihilating" (*op. cit.*, p. 121). H. Rondet regards this nihilating power of the creature as effecting more than a mere privation: "L'homme en effect peut résister à la grâce. Dire que le mal est pure privation est insuffisant, car le mal moral s'appelle le péché et le péché concrètement est une réalité vécue, un acte par lequel délibérément l'homme dit *non* à Dieu" ("Prédestination, grâce, et liberté," *Nouvelle revue théol.* 69 [1947] p. 464).

that his power to shape the divine plan is more clearly manifested. But, as Pius XII has indicated,⁶³ it seems that we should speak in more general terms. Even in good free choices the creature is fulfilling a condition laid down in the antecedent plan of God, and hence is joining a certain portion of that plan to the real world, making that portion be part of the consequent plan of God.

It is important at this point to distinguish the free choice of the creature from that act of which it is the free choice.⁶⁴ Physically and ontologically, this choice is the determination-to-one of the active power of the creature that regards many possible actions, including the possibility of failure.⁶⁵ This determination-to-one adds nothing to the ontological perfection of the creature and its power of action.⁶⁶ The power to determine oneself in this way belongs to the free crea-

⁶³ "... Dio attenderà, per usare della sua onnipotenza creatrice, che voi diciate il vostro sì. Egli, che, dominando la sua forza, giudica con mitezza e ci governa con molta clemenza (Sap. 12:18), non vuol trattarvi da strumenti inerti o senza ragione, come il pennello nella mano del pittore; ma vuole che voi liberamente poniate l'atto che Egli aspetta per compiere la sua opera creatrice e santificatrice" (*op. cit.*, 3, 7).

⁶⁴ Scheeben distinguishes this free choice from the act following it as "cooperation and consent" from "work and the effective movement": "As the tendency and inclination to good, which precedes the deliberate advertence of the will, passes over to actual movement when the free will accedes to it, so the divine will to move really moves when the will of man accedes to it under the influence of grace, and makes God's design his own. As the carrying out of the impulse to which God inspires the creature presupposes the consent and cooperation of the creature's free will, so on the part of God the will to carry through the impulse supposes foreknowledge of this cooperation and is consequent upon it, and is therefore essentially a *praedestinatio consequens*, consequent predestination. But, as should be carefully noted, it is consequent not upon any works performed by the creature or his meritorious movement toward the supernatural—with regard to these it remains antecedent, as their efficient cause—but only in reference to the creature's cooperation, which likewise precedes the work and the effective movement" (Scheeben, "Nature of Predestination," in *The Mysteries of Christianity* [St. Louis, 1946] p. 703).

⁶⁵ J.-H. Nicolas notes how the created defect *precedes* God's motion to a defective act: "... Si nous considérons, pour la pureté du cas, une créature libre n'ayant en elle aucune disposition antécédente mauvaise, comme Adam ou les anges, nous voyons que Dieu est la cause directe de tout ce qui dans cette créature précède le péché, sauf sa défectibilité qui vient du néant à partir de quoi elle est faite. Il est pourtant une disposition qui ne vient aucunement de lui, c'est la défaillance coupable. Cette défaillance est liée à un acte libre déterminé, et *le précède* d'une priorité de nature; elle est donc la disposition qui appelle la promotion physique à cet acte libre déterminé: Dieu connaissant cette défaillance dans son décret permissif, prédétermine l'acte libre qui se trouve lié à elle" (*art. cit.*, p. 517).

⁶⁶ B. Lonergan expresses the essential point here as it effects causation in general: "... both philosophers [Aristotle and St. Thomas] keenly realized that causation must not be thought to involve any real change in the cause as cause; Aristotle, because he conceived action as a motion, placed it in the effect; St. Thomas, who conceived it simply as a formal

ture by the very fact that it is truly constituted by God in first act. The determination links first act with second act in the concrete order. The production of the second act is the result of God's power acting through the creature freely determining itself. The second act depends immediately upon the power of the creature freely determined to act and act in this way, and ultimately upon the power of the First Cause.

At no point in the process does the second cause become independent of the First Cause. God causes the creature to freely determine itself to one, and in this sense is the cause of the determination-to-one which is free choice. But to say that God causes the determination-to-one does not mean that God determines to one, just as to say that God causes the shining of the sun does not mean that God shines; for in both cases He causes the created reality in and through the creature according to the nature of the creature. By the very fact that He causes the free creature to be in first act, He causes it to determine itself freely to one, since, as we observed, this determination-to-one adds nothing to the ontological perfection of first act. We have seen that the antecedent plan of God, embracing as it does the eternal law of God, imposes necessity of some kind upon creatures—physical necessity upon irrational creatures, moral necessity upon rational creatures. But the consequent plan of God, the providence by which God actually governs the world, imposes no new necessity of any kind (except the consequent necessity of the principle of contradiction: whatever is necessary is while it is).⁶⁷ However, if the execution of the consequent plan of God meant that God determined free creatures to

content, was able to place it in the cause; but though they proceed by different routes, both arrive at the same goal, namely, that the objective difference between *posse agere* and *actu agere* is attained without any change emerging in the cause as such" ("St. Thomas' Theory of Operation," THEOL. STUDIES 3 [1942] 380). Scheeben considers the matter in the precise context of grace: "If *gratia effectrix*, to be really *effective*, still needs a special *efficacia virtutis*, which man does not have by the mere fact that he has *gratia sufficiens*, it is not apparent how the latter can be regarded as truly sufficient" (*op. cit.*, p. 704, n. 10).

⁶⁷ "The eternal law is an *imperium* of regnative or regal prudence in God and is given to creatures. Providence also is an *imperium*. It is an *imperium* of monastic prudence and deals, not with creatures immediately, but with God's own activity. By providence God commands Himself to carry out what He Himself has laid down in the eternal law. This *imperium* of providence, however, is very different from the *imperium* which is the eternal law. The *imperium* of the eternal law imposes necessity on creatures, either physical or moral. It imposes physical necessity on irrational creatures and moral necessity on rational ones to do what it commands. The *imperium* of *providence* does not impose necessity of any kind" (Collins, *art. cit.*, pp. 500-501).

one, then this plan would impose an *antecedent* metaphysical necessity and remove all freedom and contingency from the universe.

The consequent plan of God is concerned with predestination in the strict sense: the plan of the transmission of individual creatures to eternal life. It seems to me that Scheeben is correct in saying that all the mystery and supernaturality of predestination is found in the universal salvific will of God, not in the restricting of that will to a certain number in consequence of the fulfilment of the conditions antecedently laid down by God.⁶⁸ The ultimate cause of salvation is God, and at every step the creature is wholly dependent upon God's saving action. It does nothing of itself. In acting according to God's antecedent intention the creature at no point makes a self-originated positive contribution to the goodness found in itself or the universe. But it acts freely, because it is within its power to resist the very divine motion which it is as a matter of fact not resisting.⁶⁹ The creature has the ultimate initiative in failure. If it is lost, it is the ultimate cause of its own damnation.⁷⁰ There was no failure in the activity of God,

⁶⁸ See above p. 45. Dom Pontifex makes an observation that is applicable here, although it does not seem articulated as well as it might be: "... It seems quite inconceivable that God, for inscrutable reasons of his own, not connected with the limitations inherent in the creature, should ever will less good to the creature than it is capable of receiving. To say that God might do this is surely to deny his absolute perfection, since to do less good is less perfect than to do more good. Hence to say this is contradictory, for it is to say that God is not God, that his purpose to create is not his purpose" (Mark Pontifex, O.S.B., *Freedom and Providence* [New York, 1960] p. 55). It seems to me that only the very last phrase of explanation in the above quotation prevents him from embracing the sort of optimism proposed by Leibniz and others.

⁶⁹ See Council of Trent, Session 6, Decree on Justification, chap. 5 (*DS* 1525), and Vatican Council I, Session 3, Constitution on the Catholic Faith, chap. 3 (*DS* 3010).

⁷⁰ "If it is better to be just than unjust, how is it that a man is not made so directly from birth? And if later he is disciplined by the law and by doctrine in order to make him better, he is disciplined as one who is free and not by nature evil. If the wicked are wicked because of their destiny by the decrees of Providence, then they are not to be held culpable and deserving of the legal penalties, seeing that they are living according to their proper natures and it is impossible to change them" (St. Methodius, *The Symposium*, Logos 8, 16, tr. H. Musurillo, S.J. [Westminster, Md., 1958] pp. 128-29). The doctrine of F. Muniz, O.P., on the distinction between the saved and nonsaved is relevant here: "Por eso, cuanto el hombre hace en el orden del bien o en orden a la salud eterna, todo lo hace con la gracia por la gracia; pero cuanto deja de hacer, no secundando el impulso de la gracia, de eso es la voluntad del hombre la causa primera única. La gracia distingue el hombre en la línea del bien, haciéndole ser bueno; su mala voluntad le distingue en la línea del mal, haciéndole ser malo" (*Suma teológica de santo Tomás de Aquino: Tradado de Dios uno en esencia* [Madrid, 1947] p. 1031). Finally, Dom Webb expresses this as follows: "God has given the

nothing that He should have done that He did not do, that finally accounts for the creature's failure.

The consequent plan of God, besides the absolute decrees of good, contains also the absolute permissive decrees of evil, by which God causes the physical reality which it involves. These permissive decrees, insofar as they regard moral evil, are consequent upon the free determination of the creature to resist God's action moving him to good. God moves the creature according to this defective determination and there results the defective action of morally evil conduct.⁷¹

The consequent plan of God leads infallibly to the realization of God's eternal purpose, because it has an infallibility that derives from the antecedent plan, of which it is a particular concretization.⁷² As human beings now exist within the world, salvation is truly and really possible for every one of them. By their free refusals of grace they can exclude themselves from the society of the blessed, but they cannot prevent its eventual establishment. On the other hand, by accepting God's grace, by responding freely to His offer of friendship, they are caught up into the saving action of God and led by His grace to par-

creature its power of free will, and nothing will alter his eternal decree to respect its free choice. Therefore, once granting this, Omnipotence cannot make it to be otherwise. God never damns any creature; the creature damns itself and God does no more than respect the irrevocable character of its choice. God could only change the will of the reprobate by miraculously overpowering it, and this would mean he was acting contrary to the nature he had created. There is no past or future to God; he saw, or rather sees the creature's revolt when he creates it. Therefore to overpower its free will would mean simultaneously creating and destroying it. Being Truth as well as Goodness, God treats his creatures according to their true natures" (B. Webb, "God and the Mystery of Evil," *Downside Review* 75 [1957] 354).

⁷¹ " . . . Il [Dieu] veut pour cette créature libre à tel moment le bien moral: mais au moment où elle défaille librement il cesse de le vouloir, parce que par cette défaillance elle se prive elle-même de ce bien" (Nicolas, *art. cit.*, p. 527).

⁷² "The infallibility of particular predestination consists in the fact that God infallibly foresees the result of the efficacy of universal predestination, which in itself is unfailing. The infallibility that corresponds to God's love and faithfulness is not necessarily rooted in a special preference of God for the effectively predestined; rather it flows *ipso facto* from His universal salvific will under the prevision of human cooperation. Hence it is present principally and primarily in the antecedent will to save, and only as a result of this fact in particular predestination which, as consequent will, in the sense explained above, proceeds from the antecedent will, and objectively manifests the efficacy of the latter in man's cooperation" (Scheeben, *op. cit.*, p. 709).

participate forever in the divine life in the company of the angels and saints.⁷³

In the consequent plan of God, the heavenly Jerusalem does comprise definite individuals.⁷⁴ The end which God infallibly intended to accomplish is achieved in the remnant, a multitude which no man can number, who have washed their garments in the blood of the Lamb.

From the above description of the eternal plan of divine providence it appears that the problem which remains for speculative theology is not how God knows futuribles, but how He knows free acts that do as a matter of fact come to be at some time in the past, present, or future. A divine knowledge of individual conditioned free futures is

⁷³ "In the end we can be sure that good will prevail for all who do not deliberately choose evil, because God would not have a purpose which could not be fulfilled. God guides all things in the world towards the final happiness of all who have not rejected this, permitting evil which is unavoidable in the process of development, for the sake of the end in view" (Pontifex, *op. cit.*, p. 63). The same thought underlies St. John Chrysostom's beautiful exhortation to confidence: "Be not troubled then, neither despond, looking to His unspeakable providence, which one must most clearly see, alike by what He works and by what He permits . . . These things He said, signifying that nothing is done without His knowledge; but while He knows all, yet He does not act in all. 'Be not then troubled,' He says, 'neither be disturbed.' For if He knows what you suffer and has power to hinder it, it is quite clear that it is in His providence and care for you that He does not hinder it" (*Homily on Matthew* 9, 4).

⁷⁴ Cardinal Suenens has pointed out how divine election of individuals has ultimately a social aspect and of itself implies the rejection of no one: "... for us human beings a choice supposes a preference, and to prefer implies, willy-nilly, that he who has the preference relegates to a lower plane what is not chosen, that he rejects what with him is not an object of predilection. Every favor shown to the chosen is a choice made, in a sense, to the detriment of the rejected; at least the latter is put aside. But, once more, there is nothing like that with God. His preference is not the detriment of others and deprives them of nothing. On the contrary, they gain by that preference in that they are included in the dispensation of grace which assures it to all. God has chosen someone; the elect receives a higher vocation; the reach of that vocation will be more universally extended. The higher the spring, the better its waters are distributed" (*Mary the Mother of God*, p. 24). Nicolas expresses the relation of general supernatural providence to particular predestinations as that of whole to part: "Dans ce sens [of many particular predestinations according to the number of the predestined], on peut distinguer la prédestination de la providence générale surnaturelle, mais comme on distingue la partie du tout, non comme deux ordres de providences. La providence générale surnaturelle a pour fin la constitution de la Jérusalem céleste. Elle comporte l'ensemble des prédestinations personnelles, car la Jérusalem céleste est composée des 'pierres vivantes' que sont les élus, et aussi la réprobation de ceux qui ne sont pas élus . . ." (*op. cit.*, p. 534, n. 2). But while Nicolas seems to regard general supernatural providence as posterior to individual predestinations, the view we have taken here is that it is prior.

not required in order to establish an acceptable doctrine of providence; but a divine knowledge of actual free choices clearly is required. It may be that this latter knowledge cannot be had without the former—in which case we are confronted with the dilemma proposed at the beginning of this article between strict Molinism and classical Thomism or Bannezianism. But it is not evident from the doctrine of providence that this is the case. This question must be remitted to a later study. The main lines of the answer seem to me suggested by St. Thomas:

*Dominium autem quod habet voluntas supra suos actus, per quod in eius est potestate velle vel non velle, excludit determinationem virtutis ad unum et violentiam causae exterius agentis; non autem excludit influentiam superioris causae, a qua est ei esse et operari. Et sic remanet causalitas in causa prima quae Deus est, respectu motuum voluntatis, ut sic Deus seipsum cognoscendo, huiusmodi cognoscere possit.*⁷⁵

Inasmuch as God wills to act as First Cause according to the free choices of the secondary causes, He causes the actions of the creatures which they have freely determined upon, and in causing them knows them. Any further explanation of this knowledge must, it seems to me, fulfil two conditions: (1) it must not destroy the liberty of the creature by removing from him the power of determining what he is going to do or not do, and (2) it must not destroy the distinction we have made between the antecedent and the consequent plan of God.

⁷⁵ *C. gent.* 1, 68, 8.