

Since to be capable of receiving good is in itself a kind of good, potency derives its goodness from that good to which it is ordered. Human nature, which is in potency to sight, is, therefore, a fit subject; not only for this perfection, but also for its privation blindness. Evil is like a parasite, it must reside in something as blindness resides in a man. And that in which it resides is good, because it has a capacity both for the perfection and its privation. And since this capacity is a kind of goodness, the good is indirectly a cause of evil.

When the Apostles asked Our Lord to teach them how to pray, He taught them the Our Father. The last petition, or rather, passionate plea of that prayer is: "Deliver us from evil." Although evil's hold on man and the universe is limited, as we have seen, it threatens man's efforts for good. Man cannot face evil alone. He needs God. And this is why Our Lord gave to man the perfect prayer: to remind him that only in God and with God can he be victorious over evil.

—Vincent Watson, O.P.

THE PROVIDENCE OF GOD

"**F**OR THOU HAST DONE the things of old, and hast devised one thing after another; and what Thou hast designed hath been done. For all Thy ways are prepared, and in Thy providence Thou hast placed Thy judgments" (Judith 9:4, 5). Throughout the centuries, all who have believed God's revelation, have also believed in His providence. For it is evident from the whole history of salvation that our God rules over and takes care of man's world. Thus the Jews, and then we Christians, have always believed in providence.

In our everyday speech, we all know that providence means God's plan for taking care of us. The word comes from the Latin verb *providere*—which means to prepare, or to provide for. It has this same signification in English. We use it to mean both God's plan of caring for us, and also the carrying out of that plan. Here we wish to speak primarily of the first meaning, without going into detail about how God accomplishes His holy plan. And so we will merely give some general ideas about God's taking care of creatures.

Yet before we do this, it may be well to point out that not all men have believed in divine providence. Those who deny providence generally

do so for one of two reasons: some, asserting man's free will, deny God's universal control; others hold for fate or determinism, so that God can not really intervene to take care of us. The ancient Greek pagans taught such a fate, after the manner of the Blind Fate which we see in Homer. Similarly, there are many modern versions of determinism, such as those who teach a "law of nature" or mechanistic world, or again, much of modern existentialism. On the other side, as we said above, many hold for free will in such a way as to rule out providence. Cicero held this opinion many centuries ago; and throughout the history of modern times, it has been prevalent among the thinkers of the Enlightenment, and among many materialists and evolutionists.

Now these two positions are the opposite extremes on this subject, and, as per usual, the truth lies somewhere in between. Thus we Catholics have always believed in divine providence, and at the same time defended free will, and also the natural laws of the universe. For us, these truths do not contradict one another; rather, they are interrelated, and complement one another.

Now we shall return to the Catholic understanding of providence. In explaining the traditional theology of the Church, we shall try to show four things: first, why there is such a thing as divine providence. Second, that it is all-embracing. Then, that God Himself plans the care of every creature. And finally, that God's planning does not take away the freedom of creatures.

We have already seen that providence means God's arranging for all creatures; now we will try to see why God is provident. In the first place, God created all things. But not only did He make them, He also planned that creatures have a goal for their existence. Thus He created men to be happy with Him in heaven; and He made lower things to serve men; and so forth. And He not only sets up a goal, but He also plans the way the creature is to reach its goal. For instance, St. Peter was to reach heaven by performing certain, definite virtuous actions: ruling over the Church, carrying the Gospel to Rome, and so forth. Now this planning, this ordering of creatures to their goals, this is providence. Thus, first comes creation: God makes things; then comes providence: God plans for things to reach their perfection, their special goals. And, of course, this plan first exists in God's mind from all eternity, and then He works it out in time according to His governing the world. But we will not go into this matter here. It suffices to see that God does have a plan, that He does order creatures to their goals. This is because all creatures come from God. From God they

receive their natures and also their tendencies toward their goals. God gives us not only existence, but also our motion toward perfection. This providing for us, this arranging for us the road to our goal, this is divine providence. Thus it is clear why we must say there is providence in God: for He directs all things along the way to their goals.

Secondly, when we say God arranges for all things, ordering them to their goals, we mean not only all things in general, but each single creature in particular. As the Book of Wisdom says: "For the Lord of all shows no partiality, nor does He fear greatness; because He Himself made the great as well as the small, and He provides for all alike" (Wisdom 6:7). Our Lord spoke about this many times, as when He said: "Are not two sparrows sold for a farthing? And yet not one of them will fall to the ground without your Father's leave. But as for you, the very hairs of your head are numbered. Therefore do not be afraid . . ." (Matthew 12:29-31). Or again, "Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow, or reap, or gather into barns; yet your Heavenly Father feeds them. . . . Consider how the lilies of the field grow; they neither toil nor spin, yet I say to you that not even Solomon in all his glory was arrayed like one of these. But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which flourishes today but tomorrow is thrown into the oven, how much more you . . . ?" (Matthew 6:26-30). Christ makes it so clear that God provides for every single creature. As Creator, He has made all creatures; now as Provider, He cares for each of them according to His own great goodness. And He provides in full detail for each. For example, when caring for a young robin, God arranges for it to be the fledgling of certain parent birds, in a given town, at some given time, and so on, to every detail. All the circumstances are in the divine plan. And God's plan for every creature is similar—His providence extends to each single, particular detail. All this is God's providence to lead each of us to his perfect goal.

Furthermore, it is God Himself who foreordains everything. It is true He lets other creatures share in carrying out His plan, but He Himself is the author of the roadmap for each creature's way to perfection. Thus, in the example of the robin, God has the parent birds care for it, and bring it up, and so forth—so they help in carrying out God's plan. But in the last analysis it was God Who decreed to give life to that little robin, God Who determined to give him to those parents, to be nurtured in those surroundings, etc. And correspondingly, it was God Who arranged to give to those parent birds that fledgling, and arranged for the parents to find a sufficient food supply, etc. And this is similarly true for every creature.

When one pauses to think of it, it is a staggering mystery—God plans for each thing, and the idea for each fits into the plan for the whole, and the whole of creation is ordered to the glory of God. Yes, God Himself has planned for everything—if only we would see it. If only we would open our eyes, we would understand that for those who love Him, God makes all things work together unto good (Romans 8:28).

When we say that God foreordains everything, this does not mean that He in any way takes away the freedom of creatures. On the contrary, God provides for each of His creatures according to the character He gave it. For men and women, God provides that they act according to their own free will. For rocks and stones, God arranges that they act according to the laws of inanimate bodies. And so it is with all creatures. God provides for each thing in such a way that it will carry out its own function in the universe. For when God made the universe, He wanted some higher creatures to be free, other lower ones not so. So also in His providence—for creatures which operate of necessity, He plans that they act necessarily; for those which are free, He ordains that they act freely.

Of course, there still remains a mystery here. We are unable to understand how God is in complete control, and yet man is at the same time free. Yet we know both of these are true. Considering this problem in relation to man's attaining his supernatural goal of glory in heaven we have the mystery of predestination, a special instance of God's providence whereby He infallibly brings men to Himself through their own free virtuous acts. For from faith we know that God foreordains the salvation of His elect, and yet these same elect souls work out their salvation freely. But we do not have occasion here to consider all these mysteries. They constitute a special problem of themselves, and would have to be taken up in a separate discussion. Here we merely refer to them in passing.

But we have already seen a great deal about divine providence. We have indicated that God does have a plan to lead His creatures along the road to their perfection. And this divine ordination is not just something vague and general but it is completely, minutely detailed to take care of each need of every creature. Further, God alone is the author of this plan, although He does allow other creatures to cooperate in carrying it into operation. And lastly, the fact that God foreordains the pattern of every creature does not in any way hurt the freedom or contingency of creatures, for God provides for each thing according to its own character.

This doctrine on divine providence should be a very great comfort for us. God, Who is infinitely good, has provided for us in every way. If

only we would abandon ourselves to His care! If only we would really trust that He will make all things work together unto good! And this is the doctrine that the Church has always taught. As the First Vatican Council has said: "God protects and governs by His providence all things which He created, 'reaching from end to end mightily and ordering all things sweetly' (cf. Wisdom 8:1)."

—Humbert Gustina, O.P.

IN THE WILDERNESS PREPARE THE WAY

"**I**N THE WILDERNESS PREPARE THE WAY, make straight in the desert a highway for our God." Most Christians will immediately recognize this familiar text of Isaias, foretelling the advent of Christ's precursor, John the Baptist. But few people know that shortly before the time of John there developed a group of Jews who also had heeded the words of the prophet and had fled to the desert to await the coming of the Messiah. These were the men who had copied and composed the now famous Dead Sea Scrolls which were discovered in caves near the Wadi Qumran in the spring of 1947. Most scholars have now agreed that they were the Jewish sect of the Essenes, described by Josephus in his *War of the Jews*, and also in his *Antiquities of the Jews*.

The most striking feature of the men of Qumran is the similarity that their way of life bears to monasticism as practiced in the Western Church. Many scholars, both professional and amateur, have suggested that this band of Jews was actually the well-spring of early Christianity, but a careful examination reveals that this is far too rash a statement. A study of their doctrine and customs as a religious community will make it clear that the Qumranians were primarily sincere and devout *Jews*, although similarities as well as differences can be found between the Church of Christ and this Essenic community. Almost all the information contained here has been taken from the Scrolls themselves, from ancient historians, archeology and where first-hand knowledge is lacking, only the most sound and authoritative opinions are proffered.