



DIVINE PROVIDENCE

God carries out his plan

Texts from the

Catechism of the Catholic Church

Divine providence - the dispositions by which God guides his creation

Creation has its own goodness and proper perfection, but it did not spring forth complete from the hands of the Creator. The universe was created "in a state of journeying" (in statu viae) toward an ultimate perfection yet to be attained, to which God has destined it. We call "divine providence" the dispositions by which God guides his creation toward this perfection:

By his providence God protects and governs all things which he has made, "reaching mightily from one end of the earth to the other, and ordering all things well." For "all are open and laid bare to his eyes," even those things which are yet to come into existence through the free action of creatures. (Vatican I) (302)

God's sovereignty and care for all

The witness of Scripture is unanimous that the solicitude of divine providence is concrete and immediate; God cares for all, from the least things to the great events of the world and its history. The sacred books powerfully affirm God's absolute sovereignty over the course of events: "Our God is in the heavens; he does whatever he pleases." (Ps 115:3)

And so it is with Christ, "who opens and no one shall shut, who shuts and no one opens." (Rev 3:7) As the book of Proverbs states: "Many are the plans in the mind of a man, but it is the purpose of the LORD that will be established." (303)

The teaching of Jesus about our heavenly Father

Jesus asks for childlike abandonment to the providence of our heavenly Father who takes care of his children's smallest needs: "Therefore do not be anxious, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?'... Your heavenly Father knows that you need them all. But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things shall be yours as well." (Mt 6:31-33) (305)

PROVIDENCE AND SECONDARY CAUSES

Creatures co-operate in God's plan

God is the sovereign master of his plan. But to carry it out he also makes use of his creatures' co-operation. This use is not a sign of weakness, but rather a token of almighty God's greatness and goodness. For God grants his creatures not only their existence, but also the dignity of acting on their own, of being causes and principles for each other, and thus of co-operating in the accomplishment of his plan. (306)

Free and intelligent human beings - collaborators with God over creation

To human beings God even gives the power of freely sharing in his providence by entrusting them with the responsibility of "subduing" the earth and having dominion over it. God thus enables men to be intelligent and free causes in order to complete the work of creation, to perfect its harmony for their own good and that of their neighbours.

Though often unconscious collaborators with God's will, they can also enter deliberately into the divine plan by their actions, their prayers and their sufferings. They then fully become "God's fellow workers" and co-workers for his kingdom. (307)

God the creator is the first cause who operates through secondary causes

The truth that God is at work in all the actions of his creatures is inseparable from faith in God the Creator. God is the first cause who operates in and through secondary causes: "For God is at work in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure." (Phil 2:13) Far from diminishing the creature's dignity, this truth enhances it. Drawn from nothingness by God's power, wisdom and goodness, it can do nothing if it is cut off from its origin, for "without a Creator the creature vanishes." Still less can a creature attain its ultimate end without the help of God's grace. (308)

PROVIDENCE AND THE SCANDAL OF EVIL

The question of evil

If God the Father almighty, the Creator of the ordered and good world, cares for all his creatures, why does evil exist? To this question, as pressing as it is unavoidable and as painful as it is mysterious, no quick answer will suffice.

The Christian answer

Only Christian faith as a whole constitutes the answer to this question:

- the goodness of creation,
- the drama of sin and the patient love of God who comes to meet man by his covenants,
- the redemptive Incarnation of his Son,
- his gift of the Spirit,

- his gathering of the Church,
- the power of the sacraments and
- his call to a blessed life to which free creatures are invited to consent in advance,
- but from which, by a terrible mystery, they can also turn away in advance.

There is a not a single aspect of the Christian message that is not in part an answer to the question of evil. (309)

The physical universe brought to perfection under God's plan

But why did God not create a world so perfect that no evil could exist in it? With infinite power God could always create something better. But with infinite wisdom and goodness God freely willed to create a world "in a state of journeying " toward its ultimate perfection. In God's plan this process of becoming involves the appearance of certain beings and the disappearance of others, the existence of the more perfect alongside the less perfect, both constructive and destructive forces of nature. With physical good there exists also physical evil as long as creation has not reached perfection. (310)

Moral evil and providence

Angels and men, as intelligent and free creatures, have to journey toward their ultimate destinies by their free choice and preferential love. They can therefore go astray. Indeed, they have sinned. Thus has moral evil, incommensurably more harmful than physical evil, entered the world. God is in no way, directly or indirectly, the cause of moral evil. He permits it, however, because he respects the freedom of his creatures and, mysteriously, knows how to derive good from it: For almighty God..., because he is supremely good, would never allow any evil whatsoever to exist in his works if he were not so all-powerful and good as to cause good to emerge from evil itself. (St Augustine) (311)

God brings good out of evil

In time we can discover that God in his almighty providence can bring a good from the consequences of an evil, even a moral evil, caused by his creatures: "It was not you," said Joseph to his brothers, "who sent me here, but God... You meant evil against me; but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive." From the greatest moral evil ever committed - the rejection and murder of God's only Son, caused by the sins of all men - God, by his grace that "abounded all the more," brought the greatest of goods: the glorification of Christ and our redemption. But for all that, evil never becomes a good. (312)

“EVERYTHING COMES FROM LOVE”

The witness of the saints

"We know that in everything God works for good for those who love him." (Rom 8:28) The constant witness of the saints confirms this truth:

St. Catherine of Siena said to "those who are scandalised and rebel against what happens to them": "Everything comes from love, all is ordained for the salvation of man, God does nothing without this goal in mind."

St. Thomas More, shortly before his martyrdom, consoled his daughter: "Nothing can come but that that God wills. And I make me very sure that whatsoever that be, seem it never so bad in sight, it shall indeed be the best."

Dame Julian of Norwich: "Here I was taught by the grace of God that I should steadfastly keep me in the faith... and that at the same time I should take my stand on and earnestly believe in what our Lord showed in this time -- that 'all manner [of] thing shall be well.'" (313)

God guides his creation to its ultimate destiny

We firmly believe that God is master of the world and of its history. But the ways of his providence are often unknown to us. Only at the end, when our partial knowledge ceases, when we see God "face to face," will we fully know the ways by which - even through the dramas of evil and sin - God has guided his creation to that definitive Sabbath rest for which he created heaven and earth. (314)

IN BRIEF

- **Divine providence consists of the dispositions by which God guides all his creatures with wisdom and love to their ultimate end. (321)**
- **Christ invites us to filial trust in the providence of our heavenly Father (cf. Mt 6:26-34), and St. Peter the apostle repeats: "Cast all your anxieties on him, for he cares about you" (1 Pt 5:7; cf. Ps 55:23). (322)**
- **Divine providence works also through the actions of creatures. To human beings God grants the ability to cooperate freely with his plans. (323)**
- **The fact that God permits physical and even moral evil is a mystery that God illuminates by his Son Jesus Christ who died and rose to vanquish evil. Faith gives us the certainty that God would not permit an evil if he did not cause a good to come from that very evil, by ways that we shall fully know only in eternal life. (324)**

