

Recovering a Doctrine of Providence: A Report

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I WILL TRY TO DELIVER in my article a report on some contemporary attempts to recover Aquinas's doctrine of providence.¹ I shall start by reconstructing the main lines of Thomas's teaching and then present the crucial debate on this issue that has been exhausting the energies of Thomists for centuries. It will allow us to understand the background of any attempt to recover a doctrine of providence. At the end I will formulate my suggestions concerning future research.

Thomas on Providence

Aquinas's teaching on providence has been presented many times over the last decades. There is no need to give a detailed reconstruction.² His doctrine comprises four main statements.

1. The guidance of the divine providence embraces all beings.
2. Rational beings are guided in a special way.

¹ The following reflections were originally delivered on July, 2, 2013, at the Dominican House of Studies in Washington, DC, as part of the Dominicans and the Renewal of Thomism Conference.

² Cf. J. P. Rock, "Divine Providence in St. Thomas Aquinas," in *The Quest for the Absolute*, ed. F. J. Adelman (Chestnut Hill, MA: M. Nijhoff, 1966), 67–103; J.-P. Torrell, "Dieu conduit toutes choses vers leur fin: Providence et gouvernement divin chez Thomas d'Aquin," in *Ende und Vollendung: Eschatologische Perspektiven im Mittelalter*, ed. J. A. Aerts (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2001), 561–94.

3. Providential guidance includes in itself contingent events and free actions by humans.
4. The analogy that helps us to conceive the operation of providence is that of the virtue of prudence.

Ad 1: It is difficult to admit that all that happens may be seen as submitted to the guidance of providence. There are so many events that seem to be incomprehensible and absurd, given the existence of some divine guidance. One cannot be surprised that theologians and philosophers have always been tempted to reduce the scope of providential guidance. In the thirteenth century, great patrons of such interpretations were the Arabic thinkers Avicenna and Averroes on the one hand and Moses Maimonides on the other. They limited the interest of divine guidance to the maintenance of species. God does not care about falling leaves in the autumn or about a particular spider consuming a particular fly.³

Aquinas does not go in this direction. For him the scope of the divine guidance must be absolutely complete. If we had to admit to some limits, they would compromise the perfection of divine sovereignty and omnipotence. In addition, such limits would be incoherent with Thomas's metaphysics. It is only God who supplies being to every creature. So, everything that exists needs the constant influx of *esse* given by God and it is unconceivable that something exists without God's providential presence.

God's presence is to be understood as providential because the gift of being—making created nature exist—activates some order, some plan inscribed in nature itself. Yet this plan cannot be properly discovered without its purpose and reached without additional divine help. Providence is, because of that, interpreted by Thomas as the reason for ordering things to their end (*ratio ordinandorum in finem*).⁴ This end and purpose of all things must be divine goodness.

Ad 2: Although Aquinas does not follow Maimonides in reducing the scope of divine guidance, he agrees with him about a special care by

³ Cf. Maïmonide, *Le guide des égarés*, c. 17, ed. S. Munk (Paris: A. Franck, 1856–66 ; new ed., G. P. Maisonneuve, 1960), 3:129–30. For more about it with the short presentation of Arabic interpretations, see M. Paluch, *La profondeur de l'amour: Évolution de la doctrine de la prédestination dans l'œuvre de saint Thomas d'Aquin* (Paris: Vrin, 2004), 123–25.

⁴ Cf. *Summa theologiae* I, q. 22, a. 1, resp.

providence for rational creatures. This special kind of guidance is connected with capacity: provided with reason and *liberum arbitrium*, rational beings are capable of directing themselves and attain this way, the level of similarity to the Creator that is out of reach for all the other beings.

The special type of providence concerning rational beings directed to eternal life is called predestination. The interpretation of predestination as a special case of providence is not only some terminological option. It opens a possibility to inscribe the doctrine of predestination into a treatise on God. On the other hand the connection of providence to predestination allows one to establish a relationship of divine guidance to Christology. It is thanks to Christ that we receive all the salutary support we need.

Ad 3: The most important challenge to every doctrine of providence is to explain how to combine divine guidance and contingency, God's action and human freedom. In the perspective adopted by Aquinas the clue is divine transcendence. God is radically other than the created world. Because of his radical otherness he does not enter into the same order with the created world, although being its ultimate foundation.

Such a way of conceiving the mystery of God has important consequences. First of all, it gives an opportunity to see the connection between divine transcendence and immanence. Paradoxically, the radical otherness of God does not trouble the possibility of God's immanent presence in the created world but allows it on the innermost level. God is immanent not despite of his transcendence but *because* of it.

This interpretation—expressing the doctrine of the ecumenical councils and shared by the mainstream of Catholic theologians through the centuries—finds a description in Aquinas's works in terms of causality. The secondary causes may be necessary or contingent. Yet their contingency or necessity depends on the proximate cause. The first cause attains its effects through both the necessary and contingent causes. As Thomas says,

even though nothing can resist the divine will, our will, like everything else, carries out the divine will according to its own proper mode. Indeed, the divine will has given things their mode of being in order that His will be fulfilled. Therefore, some things fulfill the divine will necessarily, other things, con-

tingently; but that which God wills always takes place.⁵

Obviously, our mind has difficulty accepting such a solution. As in the case of the *creatio ex nihilo*, we can understand such an explanation but we cannot imagine it. God is not an element of the created world. Because of that we will be always tempted to reduce the divine causality to the level of created causality and we need to constantly struggle to safeguard the divine otherness in all our attempts to develop this kind of explanation.

A special problem connected with this explanation is a convincing answer to the question concerning roots of evil. I will come back to this issue soon.

Ad 4: The use of prudence as a model to interpret divine providence may seem too anthropomorphic. But if we want to take a step forward in our comprehension of divine life, we must rely on some analogy, keeping in mind that being created in the image of God, we represent in our life God's activities, although in a deeply imperfect way.

The idea to interpret providence as a part of prudence was given by Cicero.⁶ The virtue of prudence was interpreted by Aristotle as "right reason applied to practice" (*recta ratio agibilium*).⁷ Understood according to this definition, prudence contains several elements that seem to be very useful in the understanding of providence.

First, prudence is the virtue that allows the choice of the right means to the purpose. Providence seen through such a characteristic focuses on the order inscribed in creatures directing them to the ultimate end. Second, although placed on the side of reason, prudence concerns in its activities operations of reason and will. Prudence brings the knowledge of the ultimate end and it helps in the election of the proper means, thanks to the integrity of the moral virtues. If we interpret providence

⁵ *De veritate*, q. 6, a. 3, ad 3. English translation from <http://dhsprory.org/thomas/QDdeVer6.htm>. Cf. *ST I*, q. 19, a. 8. On the importance of this text, see B. J. F. Lonergan, *Gnade und Freiheit: Die operative Gnade im Denken des hl. Thomas von Aquin*, trans. P. Fluri and G. B. Sala (Innsbruck: Tyrolia-Verlag, 1998), 110–12; B. McGinn, "The Development of the Thought of Thomas Aquinas on the Reconciliation of Divine Providence and Contingent Action," *The Thomist* 39 (1975): 741–52, esp. 748.

⁶ Cicero, *De inventione* II, c. 53, n. 160.

⁷ Aristotle, *Ethics* VI, ch. 4 (1140 b 4 and 20).

within this pattern, we understand that providence engages an integral operation of reason and will. Third, while operations of *ars* are transitive, operations of prudence are intransitive; they remain in its subject.⁸ Providence seen in such a light must be understood as an absolutely internal divine plan that is externally reflected in its execution called “government” (*gubernatio*). Although the distinction between “internal Providence” and “external government” may seem unnecessary and purely ornamental, it has its speculative importance. It helps to express that providence does not abolish contingency and *liberum arbitrium*: the eternal divine providence, being only internal, does not impose necessity on the events in the created world, and thus the immediacy of divine care over all creatures expressed by providence does not challenge the consistency of chains of secondary causality taken into account in the government.

The Favorite Dispute

Without any doubt the main challenge of the doctrine presented concerns the reconciliation between divine sovereignty and human freedom. It has been obvious for all the scholars inspired by Thomas’s work for centuries that both should be kept but there has not been an agreement *how* to explain their relationship. The controversy *De auxiliis* at the end of the sixteenth century determined the language of the following debates.⁹ Since the dispute started between Luis de Molina and Dominic Bañez, it has been returning to the Thomistic tradition in accordance to the main lines given at this moment, although in a progressively more and more nuanced way. Its two last especially instructive “editions” occurred thanks to the exchange of texts between Francisco Marín-Sola and Réginald Garrigou-Lagrange in the first half of the twentieth century and later between Jacques Maritain and Jean-Hervé Nicolas.¹⁰ The

⁸ Although at the beginning of his career Thomas used the analogy of *ars* to explain providence, he passed very quickly to *prudencia*. The reason was its intransitive operation. See J.-P. Torrell, “*Dieu conduit toutes choses vers leur fin*,” 565–66.

⁹ On this issue, see X.-M. Le Bachelet, *Prédestination et grâce efficace. Controverse dans la Compagnie de Jésus au temps d’Aquaviva, 1610–1613: Histoire et documents inédits* (Louvain: Museum Lessianum, 1931).

¹⁰ The main bibliography: F. Marín-Sola, O.P., “El sistema tomista sobre la moción divina,” *Ciencia Tomista* 32 (1925): 5–54; Marín-Sola, “Respuesta a algunas objec-

initiators of both these last exchanges (i.e., Marín-Sola and Maritain) were interested—in accordance with the concern of various doctrines of providence proposed in the twentieth century—in a justification of divine innocence¹¹ and they studied carefully the permission by God of moral evil. Obviously, it will not be possible to go now into the depths of these passionate discussions. I will try to outline the main issues focusing on the last exchange.

The key concepts used in all these discussions were “motion” and “decree.” The providential auxiliary influence should be distinguished from the creational influx (*creatio continua*). Because of that, one needs to describe the divine providential support as a constant help that is different from creating—the term *motio* seems to be appropriate here—and as a divine act that is separate from the act of creation—the term “decree” expresses this content. Yet one should never forget that both these terms are used analogically and divine “motions” and “decrees” should not be understood as the created ones are.¹² Is it possible to define them further?

tiones acerca del sistema tomista sobre la moción divina,” *Ciencia Tomista* 33 (1926): 5–74; Marín-Sola, “Nuevas observaciones acerca del sistema tomista sobre la moción divina,” *Ciencia Tomista* 33 (1926): 321–97; R. Garrigou-Lagrange, O.P., *La providence et la confiance en Dieu: Fidélité et abandon* (Paris: Desclée de Brouwer, 1933); Garrigou-Lagrange, *La prédestination des saints et la grâce: Doctrine de saint Thomas comparée aux autres systèmes théologiques* (Paris: Desclée de Brouwer, 1936); Garrigou-Lagrange, “La prémotion physique,” in *Dictionnaire de Théologie Catholique*, XIII/1 (1936), 31–77; Garrigou-Lagrange, “Pour l’intelligence du dogme de la Providence,” *Angelicum* 29 (1952): 241–50; J. Maritain, “Saint Thomas et le problème du mal,” in *De Bergson à Thomas d’Aquin: Essais de métaphysique et de morale* (New York: Éditions de la Maison française, 1944), in J. Maritain and R. Maritain, *Œuvres Complètes* (Fribourg-Paris: Éd. Universitaires – Éd. Saint-Paul 1986–1999), VIII:9–174, 127–51; Maritain, “L’existant libre et les libres desseins éternels,” in *Court traité de l’existence et de l’existant* (1947), in *Œuvres Complètes*, IX:9–140, 87–118; Maritain, *Dieu et la permission du mal* (1963), in *Œuvres Complètes*, XII:9–123; J.-H. Nicolas, O.P., “La grâce et le péché,” *Revue Thomiste* 45 (1939): 58–90, 249–70; Nicolas, “La permission du péché,” *Revue Thomiste* 60 (1960): 5–37, 185–206, 509–46; and Nicolas’s *retractationes* after his discussion with J. Maritain: “La volonté salvifique de Dieu contrariée par le péché,” *Revue Thomiste* 92 (1992): 177–96.

¹¹ Cf. M. Levering, *Predestination: Biblical and Theological Paths* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 154–162.

¹² It has a spectacular example in the explanations given to the famous *praemotio physica determinans*, the key concept for Thomists looking for inspiration in the description proposed by Bañez. They will stress that the prefix *prae* does not mean any anteriority in time but only in nature. The adjective *determinans* does not mean

Both Maritain and Nicolas tried. But neither their motives, nor the results are the same. Undertaking with some corrections the solution proposed earlier by Marín-Sola, Maritain wants to present an explanation that will describe the providential guidance in such a way that the absolute innocence of God is saved. Nicolas's priority is to articulate the totality of divine sovereignty and to describe the consequence of it, the absolute definitiveness of divine causality in all the cases of created activities. If God does not define all created actions—if one could show an area of created reality that is not under his control, God would not be God.

Focusing on the defense of divine innocence, Maritain stresses that divine motion should not be seen in the same way in the line of good as in the line of evil. He sees the main problem of the earlier Thomistic tradition as a lack of sufficient distinction between these two lines. In order to distinguish more clearly he proposes to understand divine motion as one that could be shattered. Although divine motion is fully determined (i.e., it leads to a definite good action), it must be accepted by the creature in order to flourish through a good act. In other words, divine motion brings in itself a defined help to a concrete good deed but it contains in itself the permission for the creature to fall. What is important, however, is that this permission is not a particular one; it does not concern a particular fall of a particular creature but is universal—that is, it is permission inscribed in all the “normal” motions attributed to the creatures by God.

To such an interpretation of divine motion corresponds the doctrine of a divine *consequent* permissive decree. It is only after a refusal to accept the divine motion that God himself refuses to give to a creature the necessary support to accomplish a good deed. In this way all good acts find their ultimate source in God's causality and the initiative of evil has its only source in the will of a creature.

Maritain makes a great effort to describe in a precise way this pri-

that contingency and free actions of rational creatures are excluded, but only that the whole created action is totally submitted to divine influence. The adjective *physica* does not mean that the motion is “physical” as our motions are because of some physical contact, for example, when a hand physically pushes a stick. It is “physical” motion in opposition to “moral.” In other words, it does concern efficient causality and not only a final one. Cf. R. Garrigou-Lagrange, *La prédestination des saints*, 196; 265–311. According to this way of purification, one needs to treat all the other concepts used in this context.

mary causality of creatures in the line of evil. He invents special words to express it—the creature nihilizes (*néanter*) the divine design. This action or rather nonaction (cf. *désagir*) of a creature starts by a nonconsideration of the rule. According to Maritain the nonconsideration of the rule is not yet a sin because it is not a lack of a good due—the rule does not need to be considered by the creature at all times. Nevertheless, it becomes sinful when a creature attracted by a particular good puts itself into action without having considered the rule. Maritain thinks he can avoid a vicious circle in this way and is able to demonstrate that sinful actions have their roots in a starting point that is not sinful and may be described as *mera negatio*.

Nicolas constantly and specifically criticized this last point. He insisted that he did not see any possibility of admitting some *mera negatio* at the beginning of a sinful act that does not implicate a lack of being. And because such an option is impossible, and the introduction of evil must be connected with some lack of being that is attributed or not by God, the only source of being, he saw himself unable to accept the idea of a *consequent* permissive decree. According to him the only metaphysically coherent explanation for the beginning of evil must be an *antecedent* permissive decree.

Thus God does not permit evil only in a general way. His permission must concern particular actions. A divine motion that could be shattered seems to Nicolas to be incoherent: divine motion cannot be absolutely determined on the one hand and fallible on the other. Such a solution would mean that God is not efficient in putting into practice his will that has been already defined. To permit evil in particular actions does not mean though, according to Nicolas, that God is the cause of evil. In his analysis the antecedent permissive decree should be understood purely negatively: God decides only not to intervene in the fall of a creature in a concrete situation. Because God's action is not something that he owes creatures, his decision should not be interpreted as a kind of acceptance of sin and moral evil. After this divine negative decision the creature is left to its own forces and averts from God. It is only after this aversion that God acts positively: he attributes the necessary forces for all that is positive in a chosen action. It is only at this stage of analysis—after the aversion of the creature from God—that the refusal of grace should be placed.

Nicolas had been convinced for a long time that this solution granted a correct perspective to afford a metaphysically coherent explanation of a sinful act. In his opinion it permitted keeping the total causality of God without attributing to him causality of sin. Nevertheless, Maritain, a virulent critic of this solution, was not very unjust in writing that, according to Nicolas, God arranges himself not to be a cause of evil but to make it nevertheless arrive infallibly.¹³

As one can see, both options have their strengths and weaknesses. Maritain's proposal allows in a more convenient way, the demonstration of the difference between God's involvement in good actions and evil ones. Divine innocence and God's universal salvific will (cf. 1 Tm 2:4) are confirmed. But this gain is offset by a less convenient metaphysical explanation. Philosophy is forced to serve theological purposes. On the contrary, the solution presented by Nicolas is metaphysically coherent. His explanation preserves the sovereignty of God and the totality of God's causal influence. Nevertheless, the price for such a defense is quite high: even though God is not a cause of particular evil deeds, he initiates them. Theology with its concern for divine innocence and God's universal salvific will is forced to follow a philosophical coherence.¹⁴

Unfortunately, one cannot count on the ultimate solution coming from the precise interpretation of Aquinas's texts. A Thomist as well informed as Jean-Hervé Nicolas was convinced that it would be impossible to decide on the basis of Aquinas's texts which of these two positions is that of Thomas.¹⁵ It is without doubt partly due to the evolution of his thinking about divine will and grace.¹⁶ So, one may expect that we will never be able to conclude the debate issued from the *De auxiliis* controversy in an absolutely sufficient manner.¹⁷

¹³ Maritain, *Dieu et la permission du mal*, 41.

¹⁴ J.-H. Nicolas admitted in his last article on the issue the weakness of his solution in presenting the divine innocence but maintained his critique of the metaphysical side of Maritain's proposal. Cf. J. H. Nicolas, "La volonté salvifique de Dieu."

¹⁵ Cf. *ibid.*, 179.

¹⁶ It was my attempt to show it. See Paluch, *La profondeur de l'amour*, 273–308; 312–14; 319–24, with all the bibliography included.

¹⁷ "Il est probable que les hommes discuteront longtemps encore sur ces problèmes insondables et que les uns, désireux de sauver avant tout la transcendance divine, se rallieront à des thèses qui, mettant l'accent sur le néant de la créature, risqueront de sacrifier non seulement la liberté créée, mais la créature elle-même. Les autres,

Suggestions for Future Research

Although we should not expect an absolutely satisfying description of the cooperation between the divine guidance and human freedom, especially in the case of evil, we may understand in my opinion why we have such difficulties with it. Describing the occurrence of evil in the divine design Thomas writes: "God neither wills evils to be nor wills evils not to be; he wills to allow them to happen."¹⁸ In order to present the relationship of evil to the divine will adequately, he uses a special category of permission. It means that one should avoid a description in terms of causal relationship between evil and divine will.

Obviously, such a move may be acceptable and understood only if we remember that (1) the world has been created out of nothing (*ex nihilo*) and without divine help it is prompt to disappear to nothing and (2) evil is understood in accordance with the Augustinian tradition as the lack of due good and, as a consequence of that, as a lack of being.

All these elements being considered, we understand that as creation is the entrance to being, undertaking evil is exit out of being. We have difficulty describing the divine creative activity. We know that we can understand it but we will never be able to imagine it. Should we really be surprised that we have analogical difficulties in our attempts to describe adequately activities that lead us out of being?

Nevertheless, I do not expect that Thomists will be able to abandon experiments to solve the problems formulated by the *De auxiliis* controversy and to abandon the dispute I have just recalled. Some recent studies on the issue may be proof of that.¹⁹ The necessity to sacrifice the-

au contraire, partant de l'expérience de la vie morale, mettront d'abord en pleine lumière la liberté de l'homme, bien qu'en montrant avec l'Église que, dans son exercice, cette liberté est à tout instant dépendante de Dieu. Chacune des deux attitudes comportera jusqu'à la fin des temps des variantes indéfinies." H. Rondet, S.J., "Prédestination, grâce et liberté," in *Essai sur la théologie de la grâce* (Paris: Beauchesne, 1964), 201–41, 233.

¹⁸ ST I, q. 19, a. 9, ad 3. Translation from: St Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, vol. 5, *God's Will and Providence* (la. 19–26), trans. T. Gilby (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 43.

¹⁹ Some recently published studies in the line of J. Maritain: M. Torre, "Francisco Marin-Sola, O.P., and the Origin of Jacques Maritain's Doctrine on God's Permission of Evil," *Nova et Vetera* 4 (2006): 55–94; M. D. Torre, *God's Permission of Sin: Negative or Conditioned Decree? A Defense of the Doctrine of Francisco Marin-Sola, O.P., Based on the Principles of Thomas Aquinas* (Fribourg: Academic, 2009). Some

ology on the altar of philosophy or philosophy on the altar of theology, if one accepts my description of the solutions presented above, cannot be easily accepted by any Thomist. Such a situation questions the harmony between reason and faith, a harmony that is far too important for the Thomistic tradition not to struggle for.

Future research in this area should, in my opinion, take into account three important elements.

A Double Perspective in the Analysis of the Divine Will

For many years I have been struck by the fact that the most important mysteries of reality and of faith cannot be approached without a double perspective in their description. Let us think about the description of being in the light of a double *esse/essentia* or about the description of the Trinity that must be considered as *essentia* on the one hand and as *relationes* on the other. Such a double perspective is due to the limits of our conceptual understanding and to its chronological dimension. Should we not expect something similar in the description of the cooperative action of the divine and human causality? Should we not find something similar—a double perspective—in our approach to the mystery of divine design?

It seems to me that Thomas was always willing to integrate the contingent human actions into the divine design thanks to a tool that offered a double perspective. In the first part of his career this tool was the double *voluntas antecedens/voluntas consequens*, during his last years *necessitas absoluta/necessitas ex suppositione*. The meaning of both these conceptual tools is not absolutely the same. But both were used in the sections concerning the divine will to integrate contingent actions.²⁰

Using such concepts in the center of his reflection on the divine will, Aquinas admitted that we cannot approach the divine will as accomplished without two complementary aspects. If we want to see the divine will adequately, we need “two eyes” and not only one of them. Such an

recently published studies continuing the research of J.-H. Nicolas: S. Long, “Providence, Freedom, and Natural Law,” *Nova et Vetera* 4 (2006): 557–605; T. M. Osborne Jr., “Thomist Premotion and Contemporary Philosophy of Religion,” *Nova et Vetera* 4 (2006): 607–31.

²⁰ For more on this issue, see M. Paluch, *La profondeur de l'amour*, 273–90.

intellectual option contains in itself an important apophatic confession: as long as we are *in via*, we will not be able to reach an understanding of the mystery of providence and of divine will that a single perspective could afford.

I think that it was thanks to his “two eyes” attitude that Thomas felt relatively peaceful solving the problems of human freedom. And am I wrong in seeing an important input for difficulties raised in the discussions mentioned above in the refusal to admit a double perspective in the description of the divine will? Such an option will be treated with time more and more as incoherent. Yet, although Thomas changed the double concept placed in the center of his description of the divine will, he remained faithful to the double perspective.

Transcendence of Divine Activity

Intense appeals are regularly raised to abandon the concept of “motion” in the description of the divine support attributed to creatures.²¹ It is the doctrine of *praemotio physica* that may be responsible for reducing the divine activity to immanent action considered in one order with created activity and therefore it is the *praemotio physica* that may be responsible for changing Aquinas’s explanation into a kind of occasionalism and voluntarism. To keep Aquinas’s proposal sane, one should be much more apophatic, that is, one should refuse to explain the transcendent causality of God using the concept of motion.

I do not think that such a critique amounts to an adequate summary of the history of Thomistic discussions. I am not sure that the way to protect the transcendence of divine activity may be achieved by a refusal to treat certain topics. If we agree that the providential activity should not be reduced to the *creatio continua*,²² we need some description of this activity. If it is not the term “motion” with its limits that we use for this purpose, we will have to employ another term with its limits. I would not expect a solution simply from a terminological move.

²¹ Cf., for example, B. J. Shanley, O.P., “Divine Causation and Human Freedom in Aquinas,” *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly* 72 (1998): 99–122; D. B. Hart, “Providence and Causality: On Divine Innocence,” in *The Providence of God, Deus Habet Consilium*, ed. F. A. Murphy and P. G. Ziegler (London: T&T Clark, 2009), 34–56.

²² See, e.g., on this issue Nicolas, “La permission du péché,” 9–13.

Nevertheless, this virulent critique of *praemotio physica* contains in itself something just and adequate, too. The term *motio* is much more able to be reduced to something immanent than, for example, the term *auxilium* would be. If it is placed in the center of an analysis, one should pay great attention to constantly purify it from all created dimensions by recalling its transcendent features. It is probably true that Thomists, quite often, have not paid sufficient attention to see it in this way. Therefore if we want to find a really convincing manner to present the providential activity of God, we must treat divine transcendence as an absolutely crucial element of any explanation.

The Christological Dimension

In the contemporary theological world that is focused on Christology, we cannot develop a doctrine of providence that has not an obvious relationship to Christ. Already Karl Barth being faithful to the chosen options of his theological interpretation criticized Aquinas for his unsatisfactory Christological dimension.²³

As a moderately well-informed Thomist knows, it is not true that Aquinas's doctrine has no Christological dimension. But it is true that because of the order adopted in the *Summa theologiae* the Christological aspect remains hidden for all those who have not got the necessary patience to embrace all the work and to carefully study its order.

Aquinas's explanation contains all the necessary tools to face such criticism. Predestination as a privileged part of providence opens the way to see that the divine guidance is tuned to election and filiation that are fully revealed in the Incarnate Word of God. Nevertheless, this aspect must be emphasized more in the context of providence and predestination, if Thomists want to make their perspective understood by contemporary theologians.

Conclusion

Apophatic recognition of the double perspective in the description of the divine will, an accent on divine transcendence and attention paid

²³ Cf. K. Barth, *Kirchliche Dogmatik*, vol. 2, *Die Lehre von Gott*, "Gottes Gnadenwahl" (Munich: Evangelischer Verlag, 1942), 64–65, 128.

to the Christological dimension—these are in my opinion three main elements that should be taken into account in any attempt to recover a Thomistic doctrine of providence today. We have several historical reconstructions of Aquinas's doctrine. There are a huge number of texts dealing with its important aspects because of the *De auxiliis* controversy. But we still do not have—unless I have overlooked it—a comprehensive, systematic reconstruction that would be much more focused on recovering Aquinas's doctrine for contemporary theology than one advancing some other precisions in the unending narrative of *De auxiliis*. This is a pity. The fruits of the research into Aquinas's thought should not be an offer restricted to Thomists. 