



There is nothing random in the world

What is Providence? It is one of the basic characteristics of God – to see all that is going on, was going on, and will be going on in the future as though it is the present, and to have omnipotent concern for safeguarding all creation and wisely managing all its manifestations. St. John Damascene describes it thus: “Providence is Divine will which maintains everything and wisely rules over everything.”

If we examine any kind of events and manifestations without looking into their causes and consequences, then many things may seem random to us. If, however, we look at them from a true point of view, i.e. if we judge the things happening in the world from the viewpoint of Divine intelligence, then we will see that there is nothing in the world that occurs randomly, that occurs without the will and the Providence of God. God’s mind is infinite and encompasses everything that we can fathom. The Almighty God penetrates and sees all places in a single moment: the height of the heavens, and the width of the earth, the depth of the sea and the unfathomable abyss.

In all matters of Divine rule His Providence and His care shine forth wondrously, not only directing all creatures by dint of His might, but being inherent in them and essential to them. We, being blind, think that many things in the world happen blindly by chance, whereas everything without exception occurs according to God’s pre-eternal counsel, according to His will and Providence.

The blessed Augustine justly said: “Everything that we, without understanding the matter, believe to occur randomly, chaotically, and without God’s direction, does, on the contrary, take place according to God’s will.” Let us explain this by means of an example: a master sends two of his servants to the same place, but along different routes and without telling either of them of the other. Their meeting at that place is accidental as far as the servants are concerned, for they were not expecting to meet each other, but is not accidental in regard to the master. In like manner a beggar finds a hidden trove (buried treasure or money) accidentally, but for God, Who wished the treasure to be buried there for the beggar to find it and become enriched, this is not an accidental occurrence, but God’s fatherly Providence, providing for the poor man. For God there are no accidental occurrences.

Often we are deceived in calling accidental certain events in which God’s supreme Wisdom and Providence are revealed. It was not by chance that robbers out of fear threw the body of a person they had killed into the tomb of the prophet Elisha, where the dead man, upon touching Elisha’s bones, immediately came alive. It was not by chance that Moses was placed in a tar-covered basket and sent down the river, where the Pharaoh’s daughter found him and adopted him. It was not by chance that the iniquitous Israeli King Ahab was struck by an arrow that flew in between the seams of his armor. Truly that arrow was directed by the hand of God, just as was the one which struck Julian the Apostate; only for the soldier who let fly the arrow was it accidental. It was not by chance that swallows flew into the home of Tobit and blinded the righteous man. This happened at God’s command, in order to hold Tobit up as an example to succeeding generations, as we learn from the Angel who accompanied his son Tobias. Nothing happens by chance. It was not by chance that Caesar Augustus ordered the census to be taken in the year of Christ’s Nativity. It was not by chance that Christ met with the Samaritan woman at the well in Sychar and spoke with her. All this was foreseen and written down in the books of Divine Providence before the beginning of time.

Often God, in His wise concern for us, leads us along barely passable paths of life, but He knows well the path that will bring us to the celestial paradisiacal gardens. Why should we utter complaints against the

wisest and most reliable Guide in our life? Each one of us is accompanied by God's Providence along our path of life, from the day of our birth to the day of our departure for eternal life, as long as we remain loyal to God's direction, indicated by our Saviour in His holy Gospel.

Speaking of God's Providence, it is impossible not to recall the story of the Israeli King Saul, who, being sent by his father to find their lost donkeys, found himself a kingdom. He was anointed by the prophet Samuel, to whom God revealed that Saul was the one who should be anointed to rule over the Jewish people. Everything happened according to God's unfathomable command, as though in the normal course of events: Saul found both the donkeys and a kingdom, of which he had had no thought. How different are God's fates from human intentions: Saul had no thought of a royal scepter, but by God's will was placed upon a throne. Thus, it was not by chance that the donkeys became lost, not by chance that Saul was sent to find them, not by chance that for a long time he was unable to find them, and not by chance did he go to the seer Samuel to learn of their whereabouts: all of this took place in accordance with God's Providence, in order to enthrone Saul as king of Israel.

At the same time the following question arises of its own accord: why did God wish to anoint Saul to the kingdom, if He knew in advance that the latter would subsequently fall into iniquity and end his life wretchedly?

Instead of a direct answer I will offer you my own questions: why did God create His angels in grace, knowing in advance that some of them would offer resistance to God and would be eternally rejected by Him for their sin? Why did God settle Adam in Paradise, knowing that Adam would not live in Paradise for long, but would be expelled from it? Why did Christ add Judas Iscariot to the circle of the apostles, knowing in advance that the latter would become a traitor to Him? What is the reason for such changes in God's determinations?

The blessed Jerome responds to such questions thusly: "Would you like to learn the reason for such changes? Here it is: God does not judge future deeds, but present ones, and does not condemn anyone by His foreknowledge, although He knows that a good man may subsequently change into an evil one; at the same time, by His mercy he places man in the situation which he deserves at the present time, and thus gives him strength, in the case of a fall, to return to the true path by means of repentance. Adam did not sin because God foresaw his sin, but the reason God foresaw it was because Adam was to sin on the basis of his free will."

St. Ambrose says the same: "Adam did not sin because he received the commandment, nor did Judas sin because he was chosen to be an apostle, for God did not lay upon them the need: for one to transgress the commandment and for the other to become a traitor. Both of them, had they faithfully held on to their responsibilities, could have abstained from sin. Those of whom God knows that they will subsequently lead a virtuous life, are often evil in the beginning, while those of whom He knows that they will sin, are often initially good. You are presently standing, but beware lest you fall. The holy Apostle Peter fell – and you should be careful; Judas fell, in order to deter you from falling."

No effort on our part can protect us without God's help, but by the same token, God's help without man's wish (will) will not bring any benefit either, as we see in the examples of Peter and Judas. We should avoid one-sidedness: we should not remain indolent, placing all care upon God, but equally we should not believe that by dint of our own effort, without God's help or will, we can do good. For God Himself does not do everything, in order not to leave us in idleness, but equally does not allow us to do everything, in order to protect us from pride and vanity. God leads us away from everything that may harm us, but He urges us towards everything that is beneficial for us and helps us attain it.

God's Providence is revealed with the greatest wisdom: usually not every transgression is punished right away, nor, on the other hand, is it left without any punishment at all. If God did not subject evildoing to punishment, many people would think that there is no Providence. Yet if punishment followed immediately upon the transgression, in that case they would think that there are neither rewards, nor punishment after death. For this reason God, by punishing only some, thus reveals His Providence; and when He does not punish others directly after their transgression, He then threatens them with punishment after death in the eternal life, if they do not repent in this one.

God turns all earthly misfortunes to our benefit and for our good; He allows actual sins in order to attain the most supreme, unfathomable, and mysterious goals of His Divine rule. For both the doing of good deeds and the tolerance of evildoing is a quality belonging exclusively to Divine Providence. Truly God would never have allowed evil, if He were not powerful enough and good enough to produce good consequences from every evil deed. Tell me in conscience: when did a greater or viler evil appear in the world than Adam's transgression and the killing of Christ the Saviour, the new Adam? – However, the original sin brought God from heaven down to earth, to take upon Himself the human body, while Christ's death opened up the heavens to us and gave us back all that we had lost through Adam. The supreme God is also the wisest craftsman, turning all evil actions into a reason for creating the best consequences, just as gold is produced from an amorphous lump. The Magdalene's sins served as cause for the rectification of many; Peter's fall served as an example of genuine repentance for a countless multitude of people; and Thomas's disbelief reassured many of the truth of Christ's resurrection. God did not sow sins, yet reaps from them a rich harvest of virtues. Truly *God distills honey out of rock and oil out of granite*, when out of the greatest iniquities He produces the most beneficial consequences.

In a similar manner God's Providence is vigilant over us, and keeps vigil indefatigably, so that even our most minute discomforts do not go unnoticed. Consequently each one of us, whenever we are subjected to physical discomfort, should reason thusly: this illness or other misfortune, whether it came as a result of my carelessness, or through human malice, or from some other cause, – has not in any case occurred without God's Providence, which has determined it in accordance with my strength, so that its inception and its weight (weakening or intensification) depend on God. The method of treating and healing it likewise depends on God's Providence, which instructs the physician and indicates the means of treatment, or counteracts it, for all good and bad things, life and death, poverty and wealth, – all come from the Lord. Similarly, in all things that befall us, we must reason that they have been foreseen and allowed by God. If an enemy maligns or curses you – know that all his abuses and words spoken in malice have been placed from eternity upon the scales of God's Providence: he will say only as much as has been allowed him and not a word more. Why are you opposing him and getting angry in vain? In like manner look upon all your other misfortunes, whose provenance, number, weight, duration, and end have all been foreseen by God. Therefore, subject yourself to God's Providence, saying: may Thy will be done, my God! All of this has occurred by Thy Providence and tolerance. And since Thou hast allowed this, I would be an iniquitous sinner if I were to rise against Thee in indignation. Thus I remain in obedience to Thy holy will, my God, and gratefully accept all that Thou sendest me, and will endure everything patiently.

The blessed Augustine says: "The sea of life is turbulent, and Thou, Lord, seest evildoers flourishing and good men being oppressed: this raises a tempest within the heart. O Lord God! Does this constitute Thy truth, that evildoers prosper while good men suffer? – And God replies to you: is such your faith? Is this what I had promised you (i.e. a thriving state)? And is this why you are called a Christian, in order to delight in worldly successes?" Let us humble ourselves before God, and let us soothe our hearts with faith in God's Providence whenever we see the unrighteous dominating, the righteous being persecuted,

righteousness being eradicated, and truth being destroyed. None of this would be happening if the Lord did not allow it, and in truth, He would not allow it, if He did not have sufficient reason to believe that it was better to allow than to forbid. You may say that such tolerance gives rise to a multitude of tribulations and the greatest unrest. One may feel sorry for the situation, but within the bounds of reason, for there were justified reasons for God to wish it so, since out of the greatest evil God may produce the most wondrous good, just as easily as slipping a sword out of its sheath.

Do not be surprised, for God's judgment is mysterious and unfathomable: at Christ's second coming, at the dread day of judgment, the entire life of every person will appear as in a mirror; also every reason for which God's Providence produced one or another event, and why, will be totally clarified: for all kingdoms, cities, families, and each individual. Everything will be revealed. It will be revealed how merciful was the Lord to sinners, and each one of them will remain mute; and also the extent to which the image of God's rule of the world accorded with His glory and truth will also be revealed, and how right and beneficial it had been for all.

Let us not forget that out of every evil God creates some good. What was more sorrowful than the fall of Adam and Eve into sin, together with all mankind? However, God has so reconstituted them, that the current state of a Christian is higher than was Adam's state in paradise. Christ's death on the cross was a stumbling block for the Jews and foolishness for the Greeks; however, it became the salvation of the entire world, and for all those who were called – an honor, and glory, and attainment of an eternal life of rapture (1 Cor. 1:23).

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