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Predestined in Love

In I, 23, 4, St. Thomas addresses the question of whether the predestined are chosen by God. He says that predestination is determined by God's choice, or election, and that God's choice is determined by love. Thomas begins his argument by saying that predestination is part of God's providence, which is his plan ordered to a certain end. The end to which providence works is according to God's will, so predestination is rooted in God's will. Since predestination has to do with salvation, it has to do with God's will that people receive the eternal good of salvation. Since to love is to will the good for another, God's choice in predestination is related to His love.

Thomas notes that we love someone because of the good that exists in them, but God's love results in producing good in the beloved. That is, he loves someone in his eternal will before they have done any good or bad, as St. Paul says in Rom. 9:11, quoted in I, 23, 5c. It is as a result of God's love that people are elected to be predestined to receive grace, which results in their being good. Therefore God's love operates in the reverse order as man's love.

In I, 23, 5, Thomas discusses the relationship between predestination and merit. Predestination is seen as the primary cause of merit, and free-will is a secondary cause. A person receives grace due to being predestined, and because of that grace, he is able to exercise his free will and obtain merit. Although Thomas does have a place for human free will, it is not a very satisfying picture of freedom to me because it is completely subject to God's prior choice. I understand Thomas' desire to make God's will prior to man's, but it seems to me that there is a possibility that Thomas does not address.

Could not God's plan include the giving up some of his right to choose and placing it in the hands of creatures to whom He gives free will? He would do this because He sees that giving His creatures such freedom to affect the course of history is a greater good than determining all of the events of history Himself. Since these creatures are finite, the sphere of the effect of their choices is limited. God in his omnipotence can still cause his ultimate ends to be accomplished without violating the free will of his creatures. This granting of free will is not due to any weakness or defect on God's part. On the contrary, it is a testimony to God's wisdom and power that he is able to still bring about good after voluntarily giving some control to His creatures. Also, since God is omniscient and outside of time, he has perfect foreknowledge of all of these choices without actually predetermining them. Such a move is consistent with what God later does in the incarnation, further subjecting himself to the will of creatures.