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The Theology of Thomas Aquinas, Selected Topics

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Predestination

The first church our family regularly attended, and where I was baptized, was First Presbyterian Church of Mesquite, Texas. In High School, someone asked me where I went to church, and when I told them, they said, "you must believe in predestination, then." As far as I can remember, that was the first time I had heard the word. Even though predestination is an important part of the Presbyterian tradition, mainstream Presbyterians have distanced themselves from it. Calvinists who embrace the doctrine are often called "the frozen chosen", referring to a tendency to think the doctrine encourages a lack of zeal for evangelism and an elitist attitude.

However, there are certain Biblical texts that cannot be ignored, not the least of which is Romans 8:29-30, "For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son ... And those whom he predestined he also called; and those whom he called he also justified; and those whom he justified he also glorified." (RSV-CE). Although it is clear that the word "predestined" has something to do with our salvation, there are many interpretations of what that word might mean. Interpretations of predestination generally teach that God's plan includes the choice of who will receive salvation. He has chosen those who are destined to heaven before their life begins. For those who wish to affirm that God sovereignly chooses who will be saved, they must struggle with the clear Biblical teaching that God has created man in

His image, and has given him free will. God repeatedly calls people to obedience, and warns that our salvation is dependent on how we choose to respond to God's call.

In this paper, I will look at how St. Thomas Aquinas addresses the subject of predestination in the *Summa Theologiae*. I will attempt to explain how St. Thomas reconciles God's sovereignty with human freedom, including the question of whether God's choice is somehow dependent on human choice or merit.

Thomas has a whole question in the *Prima Pars* about predestination,¹ which will be covered later, but before we get to that question we will begin with a foundation of understanding God's will. St. Thomas teaches that God's will is the cause of all things,² and his will is always fulfilled.³ Does this mean that we are all puppets in God's universe, always obeying his commands without a will of our own? Thomas says no, that God "imposes necessity on some things willed but not all." How then is God's will always fulfilled? Not only are things "done , which God wills to be done, but also that they are done in the way that He wills. Now God wills some things to be done necessarily, some contingently, to the right ordering of things, for the building up of the universe."⁴ What this means is that God wills certain things to happen necessarily by means of necessary causes, but for other effects, God puts in place contingent causes so that the effects happen contingently. Human free will is one of these contingent causes.

¹ Thomas Aquinas, *The Summa theologica of St. Thomas Aquinas*, translated by Fathers of the English Dominican Province. 3 vols (New York: Benziger Brothers, 1947-8), <<http://www.ccel.org/ccel/aquinas/summa.html>>, I, 23. (All subsequent references to the *Summa* will be in the form of *part, question, article* followed by "c" for the body, "sc" for the "on the contrary" section, "ob#" for objections, and "ad#" for replies to objections.)

² I, 19, 4.

³ I, 19, 6.

⁴ I, 19, 8.

“God produces not only reality but also the modes of its emergence; among these are necessity and contingency.”⁵

At this point, we need to look at the difference between antecedent will and consequent will. The antecedent will is drawn to “what is good in itself regardless of the circumstances, not to a thing as it actually is.”⁶ The antecedent will itself is not efficacious, which means that it does not always produce its intended effect. Good, “whether natural or supernatural, easy or difficult to acquire, is realized only with its accompanying circumstances.”⁷ One example is that of a merchant on a ship during a storm that would normally will to hold on to his merchandise, but he is willing to throw it into the sea in order to lighten the ship and save his life.⁸ The antecedent will of the merchant is to keep his merchandise intact until he gets to his destination and can sell it. However, in the circumstance where keeping the merchandise would put the merchant’s life at risk, his will for the higher good of preserving his life causes him consequently to will the evil of the loss of his property. So, when we have circumstances where two goods are in conflict, the will chooses the greater good at the expense of the lesser good. Both things are willed antecedently, but one is willed and the other not willed consequently.

Getting closer to the subject of predestination, St. Thomas gives the following example, “that a man should live is good; and that a man should be killed is evil, absolutely considered. But if in a particular case we add that a man is a murderer or

⁵ Bernard Lonergan, *Grace and Freedom* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1971) 108.

⁶ R. Garrigou-Lagrange, *Predestination* (St. Louis: B. Herder Book Co., 1939) 74.

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ Garrigou-Lagrange, 75.

dangerous to society, to kill him is a good; that he live is an evil. Hence it may be said of a just judge, that antecedently he wills all men to live; but consequently wills the murderer to be hanged.”⁹ This example must be understood in a medieval context where imprisonment for life was often not possible, so the only way to be sure a murderer did not kill again was to put him to death. The point is that one thing that is evil and therefore not desirable when considered in isolation becomes desirable in a particular circumstance. Therefore, when we look at eternal salvation, we can say that God antecedently desires all men to be saved, but as a consequence of free will, some people reject God’s salvation and choose to hold on to their sin. It can thus be said that consequently God wills their damnation due to the demands of justice and his desire to honor human free will.

Is God therefore at the mercy of human free will? Does human freedom imply that God is completely out of the picture when it comes to the sphere of human choices? St. Thomas does not think so, and neither does Sacred Scripture. An important verse for this question is Prov. 21:1, “The king’s heart is a stream of water in the hand of the Lord; he turns it wherever he will.” Although there is much mystery to how God can influence human action while human choice remains free, St. Thomas provides us with some insight into how that might work.

God created the things in this world to each have their particular powers to cause effects. Ranging from the mechanical forces of nature, to all forms of life, up to the highest creatures with rational free will. All of these things in creation interact and cause other things to happen, so that there is an order of cause and effect in the universe. Even though the things in the universe function by their own powers, God is not distant, but

⁹ I, 19, 6 ad1.

involved in their operation in three ways. First of all, God is the end towards which everything in the universe moves because everything moves towards a good, and all goodness is a participation in God. The second way God is involved is as the first cause of every action. The third way is that he preserves the forms and powers of things so that they can operate. He is even the cause of being “which is innermost in all things” so that God is intimately involved in everything that happens. Thus Scripture attributes natural operations to God as if they were direct actions, e.g. Job 10:11, “Thou didst clothe me with skin and flesh, and knit me together with bones and sinews.”¹⁰ So in the principles of physics that cause the planets to orbit, or the principles of life that causes an acorn to sprout and grow, God is intimately involved. Similarly, when a man makes a decision, it is God who causes the human free will to function. First, as the goodness towards which the will is attracted, and also as the creator, sustainer, and motivator of the power of free will.¹¹ As St. Paul says in Phil. 2:13, “for God is at work in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure.”¹²

Going back to Prov. 21:1, I think the metaphor of a stream of water might be instructive. When someone channels water in order to cause it to go a certain direction, he does so by making changes in the underlying bed in which the water flows. The water is still freely flowing according to its nature, but due to the underlying changes, it is now flowing in a different direction.

After discussing the will of God, St. Thomas moves to the subject of God’s love. Thomas says that God loves all things in creation, and the reason we know this is

¹⁰ I, 105, 5 c.

¹¹ I, 105, 4 c.

¹² I, 105, 4 sc.

because God gave them all existence. Thomas has already established that existence is good, and everything that exists is to some extent, good.¹³ By creating everything and sustaining their existence, God is willing the good for them. Thomas defines love to be the willing of good for something, therefore he says that God loves everything that exists. By giving everything existence, God is the cause of the goodness of everything. Thomas then compares God's love to our love. We love something because we are attracted to some good in the thing. For us, goodness is the cause of love. But for God, it is the reverse. God loves a thing, and that causes him to grant the thing goodness. For God, love is the cause of goodness.¹⁴

Does God love everything equally? St. Thomas' answer to this question does not fit well with our contemporary democratic mindset. He says that God does not love all things equally because if he did, all things would be equally good for the reason that we gave earlier that God's love is the cause of goodness in things. In other words, "since God's love is the cause of goodness in things, as has been said (A[2]), no one thing would be better than another, if God did not will greater good for one than for another."¹⁵ It is from the varying degrees of love of beings that we have the hierarchy of being starting with inanimate things like rocks, moving up through plants and animals to human beings. Although God loves all animals, he loves humans more. According to St. Thomas, however, humans are not at the top of the hierarchy. The highest order of God's creation is that of the angels. Fr. Garrigou-Lagrange calls this unequal love of

¹³ I, 5, 4 c.

¹⁴ I, 20, 2 c.

¹⁵ I, 20, 3 c.

God “the principle of predilection,” and for him it is essential for the proper understanding of predestination according to St. Thomas. We will see it come up again.

In the question on the providence of God,¹⁶ which immediately precedes the question on predestination, St. Thomas pulls together the threads we’ve discussed so far. We said that all things are good in the fact of the goodness of their existence, but God wills a greater good for his creation than mere existence. God desires that all things move towards the good, and so by divine providence, he orders things so that this happens. Since God is the ultimate good, divine providence is the ordering of all things so that they reach their ultimate good in God. Thomas associates the love of God with his will, and God’s providence with his intellect. Providence refers to God’s plan and the execution of that plan in order to carry out God’s will, which is love.¹⁷ Providence directly affects everything in creation,¹⁸ but similar to what we saw with God’s will, providence does not impose necessity on all things. Providence “has prepared for some things necessary causes, so that they happen of necessity; for others contingent causes, that they may happen by contingency, according to the nature of their proximate causes.”¹⁹

Although providence is the universal cause of goodness to which everything is subject,²⁰ this does not mean that all evil is eliminated. Thomas states the reason for this very beautifully and clearly.

¹⁶ I, 22.

¹⁷ I, 22, 1 c.

¹⁸ I, 22, 2-3.

¹⁹ I, 22, 4 c.

²⁰ I, 22, 2 ad1.

Since God, then, provides universally for all being, it belongs to His providence to permit certain defects in particular effects, that the perfect good of the universe may not be hindered, for if all evil were prevented, much good would be absent from the universe. A lion would cease to live, if there were no slaying of animals; and there would be no patience of martyrs if there were no tyrannical persecution. Thus Augustine says (Enchiridion 2): "Almighty God would in no wise permit evil to exist in His works, unless He were so almighty and so good as to produce good even from evil."²¹

God does not will evil to be done, but he does not will evil to not be done. Rather, God permits evil to be done.²² Lonergan calls this a "three lane highway" comparing Thomas' explanation to theories by Bañez (two lane) and Molina (four lane). He says that Thomas explains God's will in regards to evil as a trichotomy. "There is what God wills in no way whatever, and what He wills by willing something else; the second of these implies a third way of God's willing, namely, God's willing of the something else."²³ Although Lonergan uses the language that God wills by willing something else, I note that Thomas is careful to use the word "permit" when referring to evil. This is because he associates the word "will" with a desire for the good.

This is a very important truth of the Christian faith, which is most dramatically illustrated in the crucifixion of Jesus Christ. Here, God allowed the greatest evil, which was the cruel torture and execution of the Incarnate Son of God, in order to bring about

²¹ I, 22, 2 ad2.

²² I, 19, 9 ad3.

²³ Lonergan, 110.

the greatest good, which is the salvation of the human race. Since we cannot comprehend the universal plan of God, we cannot always understand why a particular evil must be allowed for the greatest good, but by faith we can trust that God knows what he is doing, and it is conceivable that it will all work out in the end.

With the laying of a foundation of God's will, his love, and his providence, we are ready to address the topic of predestination itself. St. Thomas begins question 23, "Of Predestination," with these words, "After consideration of divine providence, we must treat of predestination and the books of life." Thomas connects the abstract doctrine of predestination with the concrete image of the "book of life" found in Scripture²⁴, primarily in the Apocalypse, but also mentioned by St. Paul in Phil. 4:3, and in the Old Testament including Exod. 32:32-33, Ps. 69:28, and Ps. 139:16. The OT references are vague, but appear to concern life and the plan of God. The NT references speak clearly that the book contains the names of those who will inherit eternal glory. There is an implication of certainty regarding the fate of those whose names are written therein, and we will find that Thomas attempts to give an account of that certainty.

Article 1 asks the question whether men are predestined by God, and his answer is tied back to providence, which we saw orders all things toward their ultimate end. However, at this point, Thomas makes a new distinction of two kinds of ends. One kind is natural. It is proportioned to the created nature of a thing, and it is therefore attainable by the thing by the power of nature. The other kind of end is that "which exceeds all proportion and faculty of created nature; and this end is life eternal, that consists in seeing God which is above the nature of every creature."²⁵ Since this

²⁴ I, 24, 1.

²⁵ I, 23, 1 c.

supernatural end is beyond the capability of a creature, the only way the creature can reach it is by God directing him toward it. In other words, we cannot achieve eternal life with our own abilities, we must be directed there by God.

The next part must be looked at carefully. Thomas says, "The reason of that direction pre-exists in God."²⁶ He says this because he is talking about God's providence, which is associated with the intellect of God, and Thomas' model of the intellect is that before an intelligent agent, whether man, angel, or God, does a particular intelligent action, that action pre-exists in the mind of the agent before the action takes place. For example, as I type the words of this sentence, the words pre-exist in my mind before I press the keys on the keyboard, even if it is only a split-second before. God's intellect is eternal and unchanging, so every action of God has eternally pre-existed in his mind. Therefore, if a man is going to attain eternal life, it must be by an action of God's providence, which must have eternally pre-existed in the mind of God, and that is what Thomas calls predestination. It should be noted that the term predestination can only be applied to the supernatural end of rational creatures, which is eternal life for men and angels. Irrational creatures such as rocks, plants, and animals are not capable of receiving eternal life, so they are not said to be predestined, although they are directed by divine providence towards their natural ends.²⁷

Article 2 makes it clear that predestination is something that exists entirely in the mind of God, and not in the creature who is predestined. It is only as divine providence is executed through the government of God that the predestined creature is affected. The predestined is affected in a passive way by God's active execution of his

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ I, 23, 1 ad2.

government, which Thomas ties to Rom. 8:30, “And those whom he predestined he also called; and those whom he called he also justified; and those whom he justified he also glorified.” In this verse, the predestination is in the mind of God, and as he executes his government, those people who are predestined become called, justified, and glorified by the action of God.²⁸

Article 3 addresses a difficulty that always comes up with the topic of predestination, “whether God reprobates any man.” Since “reprobate” is not commonly used today, consulting the Oxford English Dictionary gives a general definition of the verb form of the word as “to disapprove of, censure, condemn,” followed by a more theological definition, “Of God: To reject or cast off (a person or persons) from Himself; to exclude from participation in future bliss.”²⁹ In some ways, this definition appears to be consistent with Thomas’ usage of the word, but there is a sense where this definition has a connotation that is more active than St. Thomas uses it.

In each article, St. Thomas begins with several objections, and then begins his response with an appeal to authority. His appeal to authority for this question is the difficult statement contained in Mal. 1:2-3, “Yet I have loved Jacob but I have hated Esau,”³⁰ which St. Paul also quotes in connection with the topic of predestination in Rom. 9:13. This is a verse that cannot be ignored when treating this subject, and Thomas takes it straight on. He begins his explanation with the sober, but straightforward statement, “I answer that, God does reprobate some.”³¹

²⁸ I, 23, 2 c.

²⁹ “reprobate, v.1, 2,” *The Oxford English Dictionary*, 2nd ed. 1989, *OED Online* (Oxford: Oxford University Press. 4 Apr. 2000), <<http://dictionary.oed.com/cgi/entry/50203412>>.

³⁰ I, 23, 3 sc.

³¹ I, 23, 3 c.

As was said in article 1, predestination is a part of providence, but we have seen that providence permits certain defects in things that are subject to providence. Since men are ordained to eternal life by the providence of God, it is also part of providence to allow some men to fall away from the end of eternal life. When God's providence allows someone to fall away from eternal salvation, it is called reprobation. St. Thomas says, "Thus, as predestination is a part of providence, in regard to those ordained to eternal salvation, so reprobation is a part of providence in regard to those who turn aside from that end."³² Notice that there is an asymmetry in that sentence. When speaking of predestination, he says "*ordained* to eternal salvation." The ordaining to salvation is an act of God. When speaking of reprobation, he says "those who *turn aside*," which is an act of man. This asymmetry is important to Aquinas, and it is required by the Catholic faith. The doctrine of "double predestination", which treats the two outcomes more symmetrically, is condemned by the Church as heresy.

Another important point is brought up in this article. Reprobation involves more than just foreknowledge. God, being outside of time, sees all events of time simultaneously. Thus he can appear to predict events that are future to us, with the certainty of direct knowledge. Predestination and reprobation are more than foreknowledge. "Therefore, as predestination includes the will to confer grace and glory; so also reprobation includes the will to permit a person to fall into sin, and to impose the punishment of damnation on account of that sin."³³ Again we see the asymmetry of the verbs "confer" and "permit".

³² Ibid.

³³ Ibid.

Because this is such a controversial doctrine, it might be helpful to look at the objections that Thomas raises. The first objection is that God loves every man, according to Wis. 11:25 (vs 24 in RSV-CE), “For thou lovest all things that exist, and hast loathing for none of the things which thou hast made, for thou wouldst not have made anything if thou hadst hated it.” The objection is that no one reprobates what he loves.³⁴ Aquinas responds that God loves all his creatures, and wishes them all some good. However he does not love all things equally, and does not wish the same good for all things, including all men. To the extent that he does not wish the good of eternal life for particular men, he is said to hate or reprobate them.³⁵ We see here the principle of predilection that Fr. Garrigou-Lagrange says is so important. Earlier we saw that this principle resulted in the hierarchy of being that we see in the universe. Now we see that within humanity, predilection results in the predestination of some and the reprobation of others.

The second objection says that if predestination is the cause of salvation of the predestined, then reprobation would be the cause of loss of the reprobate. The objection then quotes Hosea (Osee) 13:9, “Destruction is thy own, O Israel: thy help is only in me.” (Douay-Rheims),³⁶ which implies that God does not cause destruction, but only offers help. In reply, Thomas says that reprobation and predestination differ in causality. Predestination causes the final end for the predestined of glory, as well as the grace that is received in this life in order to reach glory. Reprobation is not the cause of sin, “but it

³⁴ I, 23, 3 ob1.

³⁵ I, 23, 3 ad1.

³⁶ The RSV-CE is “I will destroy you, O Israel; who can help you?”, which has the opposite meaning.

is the cause of abandonment by God.” In other words, the reprobate does not receive the same grace that causes the predestined to reach glory, but the guilt of the reprobate which leads to his punishment is caused by his sin, which he freely chooses, and is not caused by God.

The third objection has to do with the fact that there is no way for the reprobate to get the grace that he needs to be saved, so it is unjust for guilt to be imputed to him.³⁷ The reply is that reprobation does not take anything away from the power of the person reprobated. It is not absolutely impossible for the reprobate to obtain grace, but only a conditional impossibility, and the predestined are necessarily saved, but it is a conditional necessity that does not do away with freedom of choice.³⁸

Article 4 asks the question of whether the predestined are chosen by God. This explores the related idea of election, which is stated clearly in the passage that Thomas quotes from Eph. 1:4, “he chose us in him before the foundation of the world.”³⁹ Thomas says that predestination presupposes election in the order of reason, and election presupposes love. This article makes explicit what might have been assumed in the previous articles, that God, out of love, chooses those who are predestined to eternal life. As has already been said, predestination is of providence, and providence is the plan of God existing in his intellect “directing the ordering of some things towards an end.”⁴⁰ The directing towards an end implies a will for that end, so predestination of

³⁷ I, 23, 3 ob3.

³⁸ I, 23, 3 ad3.

³⁹ I, 23, 4 sc.

⁴⁰ I, 23, 4 c.

some to salvation implies that God wills their salvation, which then implies that he loves them.

In humans, election precedes love because as was said before, our will in loving does not cause good in the loved, but we love something by a good that already exists in it. We choose something because it is good, and thus we love it. In God it is the reverse, he initially loves something, and that love causes the good in the thing. So in God, love precedes election, and election precedes predestination.⁴¹

In the third objection in this article, Thomas brings up 1 Tim. 2:4, which says that God “wills all men to be saved,” but that contradicts the idea that God chooses only some to be saved.⁴² In his reply, St. Thomas says that the God wills all men to be saved by His antecedent will, which is to will relatively, but not by His consequent will, which is to will simply.⁴³ So while God does desire all men to be saved, he is not willing to sacrifice other goods, like human free will, and possibly other things we don’t understand, in order to make all men be saved.

Article 5 addresses a topic that is still highly debated in Christian circles, whether the foreknowledge of merits is the cause of predestination. In other words, did God decide that he would predestine people to eternal life based on any merits in them. Thomas then examines the various ways that someone might merit predestination. The first way is based on merits from a former life. This was the way that Origen accounted for the hierarchy of being, the various circumstances into which we are born, as well as predestination for salvation. Thomas counters this using the passage from Rom. 9:11-12,

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² I, 23, 4 ob3.

⁴³ I, 23, 4 ad3.

‘though they were not yet born and had done nothing either good or bad, in order that God’s purpose of election might continue, not because of works but because of his call, she was told, “The elder will serve the younger.”’ This passage is talking about Jacob and Esau, and St. Paul says that Jacob was chosen before he had a chance to do good or bad, ruling out the possibility that he had merited being chosen in a prior life. Views similar to Origen’s are not common among Christians these days, but there are similarities in Hinduism, Buddhism, and the various New Age religions.

Next, Thomas deals with the possibility that merits in this life are the reason and cause of predestination, which is what the Pelagians taught. They said that the beginning of doing well started with us, and was finished by God. Therefore some received the effect of predestination because they prepared for it, but others did not because they did not prepare. Thomas has a very short argument to this that I won’t get into here. St. Augustine and others have done a sufficient job arguing against Pelagianism.

The next possibility is similar to what is commonly held today, even among Catholics. Thomas describes it as “merits following the effect of predestination are the reason of predestination.”⁴⁴ That is, God pre-ordains to give grace to a person knowing that he will make good use of it. Thomas’ concern with this view is first of all that it makes a distinction between what flows from grace and what flows from free will, “as if the same thing cannot come from both.”⁴⁵ A person receives grace because he is predestined to salvation. Grace is now operating in that person as a first cause, and his free will operates as a secondary cause. His free will now operates differently because it

⁴⁴ I, 23, 5 c.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

is operating in a person who has been changed by grace. This means the operation of his free will is an effect of predestination, and we cannot make the effect of something to be the cause of it, "whatsoever is in man disposing him towards salvation, is all included under the effect of predestination; even the preparation for grace."⁴⁶

The reason for predestination according to Thomas is not anything good in the predestined, but the goodness of God. God's goodness is the first cause of predestination, and predestination is directed towards the end of God's goodness.

The third objection in this article is that it is unjust for unequal things to be given to equals, therefore there must be something that makes the predestined more worthy than the reprobate.⁴⁷ The answer to the charge of injustice is that salvation is a gift, not a matter of debt or justice. It is up to the giver whether he wants to be more generous to one or to another, as is illustrated by the parable of the workers in the field, Matt 20:15, "Am I not allowed to do what I choose with what belongs to me? Or do you begrudge my generosity?"⁴⁸

Why isn't God equally generous to all? It must be remembered that God has been generous to all of us with many gifts, beginning with our existence, and all of us have rejected his gifts by sinning against God. He then chooses to give grace to some, which overcomes sin and brings salvation, but he does not do that for all men. Why not? Some answer that it is God's business, and although that is true, St. Thomas always tries to find a reason if a reason can be found, and in this case he finds his reason in the purpose of creation.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ I, 23, 5 ob3.

⁴⁸ I, 23, 5 ad3.

God made the universe through his goodness so that his goodness may be represented in things. God's goodness is simple, which means it is not composed of parts, but for that goodness to be represented in created things, it must be done by means of a great multiplicity of things. For no one created thing can come close to the infinite goodness of God. So God not only created a great number of things, but many different kinds of things at many different levels of goodness and different grades of being. As we covered before, there are defects that are included in creation, and God allows these evils so that greater goods would be possible.

What God has done in the whole of the universe, he has also done in the whole of the human race. "God wills to manifest His goodness in men; in respect to those whom He predestines, by means of His mercy, as sparing them; and in respect of others, whom he reprobates, by means of His justice, in punishing them. This is the reason why God elects some and rejects others."⁴⁹ Thomas is saying that if God saved everyone, his justice would not be manifest as well as if he allowed some to receive the punishment they deserve.

Thomas uses two passages from St. Paul to support his explanation. The first is Rom. 9:22-23, "What if God, desiring to show his wrath and to make known his power, has endured with much patience the vessels of wrath made for destruction, in order to make known the riches of his glory for the vessels of mercy, which he has prepared beforehand for glory." God permits ("endures with much patience") evil in order that his justice ("wrath") may be made manifest. The second passage is 2 Tim. 2:20, "In a great house there are not only vessels of gold and silver but also of wood and earthenware, and some for noble use, some for ignoble." Thomas uses this passage to

⁴⁹ Ibid.

draw an analogy between a great house and God's creation. Just as a great house has many vessels, some made of precious material for noble use, and some made of common material for common use, in the same way, God has set aside some people for salvation. It is interesting that the context of the 2 Timothy passage is an exhortation for Timothy to purify himself so that he can be a consecrated vessel, thus emphasizing the human responsibility. This is not the case, however, in the passage from Romans, which is in the context of God's sovereign plan to allow the Israelites to fall away for a time so that he can give salvation to the Gentiles. It is in this same chapter that St. Paul quotes, "Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated," (v. 13) and says, "he has mercy upon whomever he wills, and he hardens the heart of whomever he wills" (v.18).

Thomas has given an account of why not all men are saved, but the question remains why a particular person is chosen for glory or not. At this point, Thomas says the reason lies completely in the divine will, which we have no means to penetrate.⁵⁰

Article 6 addresses the certainty of predestination. It is infallibly certain without imposing necessity, as we have already said regarding God's providence and will. The effect of predestination is contingent on human free will, but that does not lessen its certainty.⁵¹ It is possible for someone to begin on the road of salvation, but to fall away and die in the state of mortal sin, and thus not be saved. However, such a person was not predestined for salvation. All who are predestined will one way or another reach salvation.⁵²

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ I, 23, 6 c.

⁵² I, 23, 6 ad2.

Article 7 addresses an aspect of the question that does not appear to be discussed much these days. It is much more of a medieval kind of question, which is whether the number of the predestined is certain. In one sense, it follows that if God has predestined all of the individuals who will be saved, then if you count them up, you will get the number. If predestination is certain, then the number of the predestined is certain. However, St. Thomas goes beyond that by saying that God deliberately chose a certain number for a particular reason. Since Thomas has already said that creation manifests the goodness of God through a multitude of things, here he makes the case that the size and number of different kinds of things in the universe are significant for the proper manifestation of God's goodness. This is especially true for "those who attain eternal happiness, since they more immediately reach the ultimate end."⁵³

Article 8 asks the question whether predestination can be furthered by the prayers of the saints. This question has broad implications for how we live out our lives knowing that God's predestination of those who are to be saved is certain. St. Thomas refers us to the story of Jacob and Esau, which is the example St. Paul gives for predestination. From St. Paul we know that Jacob was predestined for inheriting the covenant of God, but in Gen. 25:21 we read, "Isaac prayed to the Lord for his wife, because she was barren; and the Lord granted his prayer, and Rebekah his wife conceived." It was Isaac's prayer that caused Rebekah to conceive Jacob and Esau, showing that "predestination can be furthered by the prayers of the saints."⁵⁴

Thomas refutes two extremes that are commonly heard to this day. The first is that because of the certainty of predestination, prayers and anything else done to attain

⁵³ I, 23, 7 c.

⁵⁴ I, 23, 8 sc.

salvation, including evangelization, are superfluous. They would not change whether the predestined becomes saved, or the reprobate lost. But against this are all of the warnings of Scripture for us to pray and do good works. The other extreme is that prayer alters predestination, and against that are the previous proofs we have given on the certainty of predestination, and its origin in the goodness of God.

If we consider the divine ordination of predestination, nothing that we can do will alter that. However, considering the effect of predestination, as we have said before, God makes use of secondary causes, which include our prayers and good works. God does not only ordain that certain people are saved, but he ordains that prayers and good works be used to accomplish their salvation. This is why 2 Pet. 1:10 says, "Therefore, brethren, be the more zealous to confirm your call and election, for if you do this you will never fall." Knowing the fact of predestination should not cause any lack of effort on our part because the identity of the elect have not been revealed to us. If we are saved, it will be by God's grace and our response in prayer and good works, and only in glory will we see how they were all pre-ordained. Unfortunately, there may be some who end up lost, who used predestination as an excuse to neglect attending to their salvation.

In conclusion, does St. Thomas' doctrine of predestination result in Thomists being the "frozen chosen?" First of all, there is no reason for a Thomist to be frozen. As we have just said, the certainty of predestination does not take away our responsibility to work for our own salvation and the salvation of others. God has chosen certain people to be saved, and he has also chosen that prayers and good works be done to accomplish their salvation. Secondly, we must not be proud of being chosen for two reasons. The first is that none of us have certain knowledge of being predestined. It is

not until one reaches the end of their life that their salvation can be known because it is always possible for someone to fall away. The other reason that we must not be proud is that our salvation is completely the gift of God. On the contrary, the Thomist doctrine of predestination takes away all basis of pride for the Christian. There is nothing that we have that has not been given to us by God. There is nothing in us that caused God to choose us. We all must humbly thank God for his love for us, that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.

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