

ANTONIO ROSMINI

DIVINE PROVIDENCE

AND

The Problem of Evil

Extracts from THEODICY

By

ALFEO VALLE

1981

The original English Translation of THEODICY was the work of Terence Watson, published in 2009, ISBN 978 1 899093 80 9 – The Extracts were transcribed by Margaret Greiff.

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Introduction

The title of the anthology compiled by the late Fr Valle was DIVINE PROVIDENCE. In it, we find carefully chosen passages from Rosmini's THEODICY, which deals with the supremely intelligent and benevolent governance of the world by the Almighty God. The word "theodicy" was firstly used by the German philosopher Leibniz in his attempt to "justify" God for the apparent presence of chaos, disorder, and evil in the world. In recent times, however, the word "theodicy" has given way to the more challenging expression "problem of evil".

It is a fact that atheists and agnostics alike often use the "problem of evil" as evidence that an infinitely good and all-powerful God cannot possibly exist. This is how the case against God was presented in c 300BC by Epicurus:

"Is God willing to prevent evil but not able? Then He is not omnipotent.

Is He able, but not willing? Then He is malevolent.

Is He both able and willing? Then whence comes evil?

Is He neither able nor willing? Then why call Him God?

St. Thomas Aquinas, with his usual clarity, presented the problem in the following terms: *"It seems that God does not exist; because if one of two contraries be infinite, the other would be altogether destroyed. But the name "God" means that He is infinite goodness. If, therefore, God existed, there would be no evil discoverable; but there is evil in the world. Therefore, God does not exist."*

Generally speaking, the problem of evil today often takes the following form: *"If God is perfectly good, He must want to abolish all evil; if He is unlimitedly powerful, He must be able to abolish all evil: but evil exists; therefore, either God is not perfectly good, or He is not unlimitedly powerful"*.

Rosmini deals with the problem in a most comprehensive way. Starting with the obvious huge limitations of human reason in comparison to the infinite wisdom of the Almighty God, he invites us to draw the consequences. He proceeds with providing and explaining the definitions of evil given by St. Augustine and St. Thomas, and tackles at length all possible objections against the infinite goodness and power of God in the presence of evil. Finally, Rosmini explains the intelligent laws which govern the universe in all its structure, and which help to make sense of the apparent and widespread occurrence of evil in the world.

Fr Valle's selection of extracts follows closely the main lines of the arguments presented by Rosmini, thus managing to help us understand the problem and to find its solution. It is a book worth reading, and it may stimulate some to read the more comprehensive book Theodicy written by Blessed Antonio Rosmini.

Finally, a word of thanks to Margaret Greiff, an Ascribed member of the Institute of Charity, for her sterling work in transcribing Fr. Valle's Italian text in English, as she found it in the translation done by the late Fr Terence Watson in 2009. We are grateful to her for the work and for her own translation of the Foreword to Fr. Valle's book, and of Fr Valle's meditation on Divine Providence immediately after the Foreword.

Antonio Belsito (*Director of Rosmini Publications*)

FOREWORD

At the inauguration of the Centro Clesio-Rosmini in Rovereto, Mons. Gottardi, Archbishop of Trent, expressed the hope that the critically important collaboration with the Rosminian Fathers would extend also to the Centre's cultural programme, to disseminate knowledge of the relevance today of Antonio Rosmini's thought and insights. The Centre's cultural work at once moved in that direction. In that first-year monthly meetings on Rosminian spirituality began, led by Fr. Alfeo Valle, Director of the Centro Internazionale di Studi Rosminiani in Stresa. This volume gathers together an anthology of precisely those texts from the *Theodicy* on which Fr. Valle discoursed during the monthly meetings at the Centro Clesio-Rosmini. It is an analytical guide to discern the essential lines of Rosmini's thought among the vast panorama of his philosophical reflections.

Why did the Centre choose to start a systematic study of Rosminian thinking with the theme of Providence in the classic work *Theodicy*? The reason is essentially a historical one. It was in his very birth-place that the young 'Roveretan priest' began between 1825 and 1827 to work on the vast material that was later brought together in *Theodicy*. He sketched its beginning in the old parlour on the ground floor of the Rosmini-Serbati palace where a fire burned in the little 17th century stove. It was here that Rosmini began the meditations that like a blazing flame have marked his thought and works. But a truer reason is the prevalence in our day of the problem, already appreciated by Rosmini, which burdens human reason in all ages; it was perceived in his century as a cap under which the human spirit suffered lacerations of sadness and desperation from which there was no escape.

The times in which we live are no less desperate. Classic theodicy (justification of God) is currently shaken by the avalanche of monstrous sufferings in an era that made possible an Auschwitz and a Hiroshima. The poles between which the contemporary man moves appear to be the absence of God and senselessness. Failure, delusions, pain, fear, dark expectations of the apocalypse and an anguished presentiment of cosmic

death are what he sees ahead, based on much contemporary literature and the painful experience of those who see things from this angle.

Thus the matters for debate were determined from the start. The service of providing that intellectual charity that can lift a man from the desperation that seems to have calcified his heart appears, therefore, to be urgent. This volume aims to be a travel guide for anyone who has the wish to leave the labyrinth by following the thread of reason, in order to recover under the vault of heaven a pulsating human heart and the Presence of a purpose that gives sense and hope to history.

By presenting Fr. Valle's readings, we hope that the fire kindled that night in Antonio Rosmini's birth-place may once more warm the town of Rovereto. The public were not slow to affirm that the Rosminian pathway was truly illuminated by divine wisdom; the light of reason carried to the summit, harmonious fusion with the wisdom from on high that comes to those who, like Rosmini, know to keep silent and adore.

May the valuable service of that time continue with this volume.

Don Silvio Franch
Director of the Centro Clesio-Rosmini

ROSMINI' S MEDITATION ON DIVINE PROVIDENCE

BY

FR ALFEO VALLE

In *Divine Providence*, Antonio Rosmini (1797-1855), the 'Priest from Rovereto', a great thinker and religious spirit of singular depth, presents and develops the theme on which his spiritual understanding hinged. Assiduous meditation on Divine Providence continued throughout his life and the vast and rich complexities of his thinking are presented in three especially

significant writings. We will give some simple guidelines to point out the pathway for a full study of this truly characteristic aspect, with interesting potential.

Above all, the *Theodicy* is a classic treatment of Divine Providence in which the great soul of the aesthete and the enquiring mind of the philosopher and theologian shine out. This is a supreme work, set by Rosmini as the crown and pinnacle of metaphysics; a resounding conjunction of the philosophical sciences and the science of revealed truth. It deals with the limits of human reason in judging Divine Providence and the serious problems that have always wearied we thinkers: the problem of evil, the justice of God in the distribution of the goods and evils of the world and the laws of Providence in the governance of the universe. Such are at the centre of Rosmini's spirituality. He covers human reason as well as faith and writes about both the perfection of the single individual and that of the whole of society, using the experience of history, always addressing the economy of the salvation of the human person.

The first two books of *Theodicy* were written in Rosmini's early years, between 1825 and 1827, and were published in Milan in 1827, as an essay, in *Opuscoli filosofici*. Book three was written some 18 years later, between September 1844 and February 1845. With an extensive preface, *Theodicy* was published in Milan in 1845-46, being edited by Poliani.

The term *Theodicy* is etymologically understood as *God's justice*, that is, as Rosmini himself says in the preface: "I attempt to justify God's equity and goodness in the distribution of the goods and evils of this world." God's goodness: this is the nub, the heart of Rosmini's deliberations in this compelling text. This is, in fact, the foundation of the whole world system. The "divine goodness is the foundation of the entire system of religion and therefore the system of the world. Wisdom only directs, power is only executive; but goodness is supreme, served by all and the end of all" (Ep. Comp. II, 204). Such, in all its fullness is the theme of the pages of the present volume; that is, to examine the arcane manner of the operation of divine wisdom and power in the government of the world, and to show how all comes together in supreme harmony in the triumph of God's goodness and for His Glory.

THE PROVIDENCE OF THE HEAVENLY FATHER

In 1828, called by God, Rosmini retired to Calvario at Domodossola and there began his religious institute, the Institute of Charity. First of all, in silence and prayer in his hermitage, he wrote the Constitutions. Part IV, called 'Foundation of the whole Institute', opens with a chapter on 'The Providence of the Heavenly Father' which gives us the key to understand this text, and is a second exposition, at a privileged moment, of Rosmini's meditations on Divine Providence.

Here we have, in full, the philosophical-theological treatise; in the Constitutions, Providence is, so to say, applied and made evident in the complexity of religious society as in the practice of the consecrated life.

It is in the first chapter of Part VI, the foundation of the Institute, that the essential foundational principles are stated with both indicative and definitive affirmations. From these, follow logically the consequences that underlie and sustain not only the exercise and governance but also the ascetic path of the individual religious.

"This Society rests on one foundation alone, the providence of God, the almighty Father. Anyone wishing to lay some other foundation seeks to destroy the Society" (no. 462).

"Members of this Society, especially those on whom its rule devolves, shall keep in mind the need to beware both of presumption and of fear in its regard" (no. 463).

"Presumption is found in members of the society who place confidence in it, in its striking organisation, in the prudence of its rulers, in the number and greatness of its members and of the aids with which God might enrich it; in those, too, who might think the Society necessary to the Church of Christ; who might look with secret contempt upon the faithful not belonging to it; and might judge to their own condemnation" (no. 464).

"Each member must fear the damage he may cause to the Society through his evil works, but there is no need for him to be anxious about the Society's well-being and increase when he does all things according to the law of God and His holy zeal. As long as it is useful to the Church, the

heavenly Father will keep and protect it; if it begins to be useless or harmful, he will rightly cut down and burn the sterile tree. The entire Society depends upon the Providence of the heavenly Father, not upon human planning, and the Father is praiseworthy in building up the Society as he would be in destroying it” (no. 465).

A definitive and solemn statement that leaves no room for uncertainties or doubts. The Institute of Charity in its coming into being and its life is founded only on Providence and on this it depends. Rosmini later developed this principle (placed determinedly and inflexibly as the foundation of the edifice) to embrace all the activities of social organisation as well as those of the religious. This proceeds from the vital and distinguishing heart of the Institute of Charity as set out by Rosmini in a logical and concise analysis.

“But since charity constitutes *per se* the end and nature of our companionship, every member must will every good as far as he can without restriction, and he must will each good only in so far as it is good. The Society, therefore, suffers no limits to be imposed on itself in the exercise of charity, but in spirit and desire unceasingly embraces all kinds of charity alike, and continually accepts to fulfil them” (no. 551).

“Golden indifference to any work of charity proceeds from this universality of charity with which the heart of each member should be full” (no. 553).

Thus the Providence of the heavenly Father through the ‘opportune signs’ will show the whole Institute and the individual religious in it what activities they should follow. By its own Constitutions, the Institute itself, much less the individuals in it, are denied any choice about the works of charity to be undertaken. Through external signs, requests from priests of the Church and the exigencies of neighbours, Providence will make the divine will known. Thus the Institute with all its religious is always and totally, in its life and activities, in the hands of Divine Providence.

The centrality of Providence leads, as Rosmini subsequently concluded, to the following: “The purpose and action of this Society, which could also take its name from *providence* does not aim at planting any new

seeds in the world, but at cultivating according to the will of God those already placed there. In this way, the Society furthers the dispensation of divine providence, which must be recognised as governing the order in which things are placed in this world” (no. 764D).

TO ABANDON OURSELVES ENTIRELY TO DIVINE PROVIDENCE

In 1830 Rosmini published a small book in Rome, the basis of his own spirituality: *Maxims of Christian Perfection*. In the fourth Maxim: “to abandon oneself entirely to divine Providence”, we are given the third outpouring from Rosmini’s meditations on this theme, having already considered the philosophical-theological and social aspects.

The same words are repeated at the beginning of each of the first three numbers of this Maxim on total abandonment in God. The very repetition conveys the special importance and profound significance of the Maxim.

“There is perhaps no other Maxim which helps more than this to obtain the peace of heart and evenness of mind proper to the Christian life.”

“There is perhaps no other Maxim which, if practised with the simplicity and generosity of heart that it requires, renders the follower of Jesus Christ more dear to the heavenly Father...”

“There is no other Maxim that our Divine Master has recommended more by his words and example...”

For sure, the disquiet and uncertainty that often torment and wear down so many souls, though they be sincere and seek after good things, have their secret and interior origin in the absence of such complete abandonment. In the same way, mistrust and despair – the ills of our efficient, assured, well-provided and provident times – have the same root cause and explanation.

Rosmini, one could say, arrived at his comforting Maxim also, but not only and of necessity, through a bitter study of Providence during his young formative years. The high concepts and tight logical conclusions in *Theodicy*

reveal the ascetic pathway of the spiritual life. Having settled the grave and thorny problems of evil, pain, injustice and the sin of both the individual and of society in the providential plan of divine justice and goodness, we reach the serene “abandonment of oneself entirely to divine Providence”.

Such a pathway, while appropriate for many souls, is, however, neither necessary nor obligatory. Not everyone can, or should, come to faithful abandonment through philosophical and theological study. Nevertheless, all can acquire and hold the gift of faith and with it understand and live complete abandon to the Providence of the Father. The message of the ‘Maxim of Perfection’ is this: everyone who wishes to be a true Christian should act at this most important and decisive moment. For it should be the constant endeavour of all Christians to abandon themselves totally to divine Providence, involving the mind, the heart and the conduct of the life that is our own little piece of history, fitted into the divine plan of the history of the world.

Rosminian teaching on Providence is certainly complete and total. In *Theodicy*, in the Constitutions and in the Maxims, we have a panoramic picture and a progressive pathway; from the most refined systematic theory to application to society and then to the individual: from philosophy and theology to the concrete situation of life in a religious society, ending with the asceticism of the spiritual life. Rosmini, as always, embraces all aspects so that each is presented as autonomous and independent. However, when considered together they appear inevitably linked coherently so that the whole of reality is covered and the divine plan can be contemplated in its unity and totality and in all its manifestations, even though our understanding is limited. Only God himself can understand the vastness and apply His most high laws, we being limited by the extent of our capacity, always adoring and blessing the most great and most wise Providence.

Fr Alfeo Valle

BOOK ONE

ON THE LIMITS OF HUMAN REASON IN ITS

JUDGEMENTS

ABOUT DIVINE PROVIDENCE

1.

STUDY OF THE WAY DIVINE PROVIDENCE
COMFORTS MANKIND

If knowledge has no effect on the human heart, if it is like a useless weight on the mind without increasing good or reducing evil, if it does not satisfy or console with at least honest hope our ceaseless yearnings, then such knowledge does not, in my opinion, deserve to be called Wisdom. If however Wisdom is that teaching which improves and strengthens us, and raises our spirit to salutary thoughts, then the only way for us to obtain this

knowledge is to contemplate the eternal designs visible in the vicissitudes of created things and make ourselves one with those designs.

And it is God himself who invites man to study the sublime ways and eternal guidance of divine Providence.

Whenever I have thought about the way God instructs the human race, I have often experienced a sublime feeling. God allows doubts or even difficulties to arise in our mind in order to waken us from our inertia and stimulate us to reflect and to investigate the truth.

We need to have before our mind the whole universe, particularly all that happens in the human race, in its growth, its division into different peoples, the dispersion of these over the face of the earth, their mutual relationships, wars, rivalries and friendships, the union of many into one and the division of one into many. In particular we must note the history of the Hebrew people whom God led by a special providence; they must be a little model of what the whole of humanity was later to be. The whole of this universe, both physical and moral, must be seen as a large sacred book opened by God before the eyes of us all. It contains nothing but problems and difficulties offered to human intelligence so that our search for solutions and answers might increase our knowledge and satisfy our mind.

The pages of this large volume turn with the passing of the centuries; the problems written on the first pages are easier to solve than those on the pages that follow, and no page can be turned

before answers are found in the human race to the problems that have presented themselves. Apparently, the most-wise God was pleased to apply to his human creatures the Socratic Method, as it is called. In this method, the most difficult truths are spontaneously drawn from the unformed minds of the uneducated and children, and in my opinion, this is what the Eternal Being does.

The delight felt by wise people when they compel themselves to penetrate God's conduct, which is sublime and far beyond all human thought, closely resembles (and in fact exceeds) the pleasure experienced in the investigation of the conduct of great people who far surpass all their contemporaries in greatness of intelligence and wisdom of counsel. We are impressed by the grand purposes of their enterprises and the new and extraordinary means which enable them to pursue these ends. The means seem to be such that no one else would think of them and are seen as totally contrary to the end, but the end and enterprise are unexpectedly and happily attained. The more this is true, the more delight we feel in understanding the extraordinary and apparently lonely path these wise people followed, and we are pleased to make our own their far-reaching views. Before the outcome was finally attained, everybody would have criticised and judged the ways as insane.

If some people therefore can, through intelligence or character, be greater than others, they often differ from others in the way they think, and sometimes separate themselves by following a way considered false and insane so that no success is seen as possible. Can we wonder then

that the most-wise God, in the government of his creatures, operates so often in a manner that is difficult for us to conceive and seems mad, in fact in a manner that is totally different from our thinking?

2

**SOURCES OF DIFFICULTY ABOUT
THE GOVERNMENT OF PROVIDENCE:
THE INFINITE WISDOM OF GOD AND
THE COMPARATIVE IGNORANCE OF
MANKIND**

When faced with difficulties about the government of Providence, the human creature should always call to mind two fundamental and incontrovertible truths: the infinite wisdom of God and his own limitation and ignorance relative to the immeasurability of knowledge.

Almighty God, endowed with an intelligence that is infinitely superior to ours, must manifest a conduct different from ours, far exceeding our knowledge, and follow rules that at first sight appear opposed to

our limited vision or seem badly suited to his ends. On the other hand, if God followed our human way of thinking, we would have no sign by which to know and admire his wisdom; we would be cut off from every means for rising to the Creator from created things which reflect divine Wisdom.

Because in creatures and events we find nothing more than a ray of wisdom that is uniform and commensurate with human wisdom, we could possibly deduce that a mind governs things but it would be a mind as limited as ours. Thus, we would conceive only the existence of an intelligence as finite as ours but not the existence of a God. We should not be surprised therefore that when viewing events in the universe, our very limited minds are presented with things that at first sight seem totally unintelligible. But the difficulties we encounter in understanding how good and evil are distributed, and the universe is governed are necessary but in no way do they harm the truth of a provident God. On the contrary, if they were absent, we would have no grounds for believing we could find any divinity behind the government of human events. Hence, the difficulties themselves are a proof of universal, divine Providence.

But there are other reasons to explain why some difficulties arise in our limited human reason when we consider and judge the government of the universe with the little rules we use to judge our own affairs and interests.

The government of a kingdom cannot be subject to the rules that govern the prosperity of a small family. Similarly, the government of the universe cannot be judged with the limited vision natural to

us mortal beings. Human thought, in addition to having a natural limitation, is limited by education and habit. We can never rid ourselves of the limitation of education. It is also very difficult to rid ourselves of the limitation of habit, which has become connatural to us and inevitably limited us in nearly all the acts of our life.

We would be strange people if we did not know that the government of the things of the universe is beyond the mind of every human being and that if God gave impudent human beings the reins of the world for just a single moment, everything would break down in confusion. Evidently the ancients saw this temerity in Clymene's son. His father let him drive the chariot of the sun for one day but, losing his way, he put earth and heaven in danger of being burnt up. Jupiter struck him with lightning just in time and cast him into the river Po.

3.

TWO PATHS LEAD TO THE SOLUTION
OF
THE DIFFICULTIES ABOUT PROVIDENCE:
THE PATH OF FAITH AND
THE PATH OF REASON

We can therefore distinguish two paths that allow us to avoid all awkwardness and doubts about Providence. One of these paths can be aptly called the 'path of faith', the other 'the path of reasoning'.

The first is broad, very straight and open to everyone. Pious people, supported by reason and strengthened to believe truly in what reason tells them about the virtue of steadfast faith, maintain that he who governs the universe is an Infinite Being, full of wisdom, power, justice and goodness. They

are content therefore to rest peacefully in him, disturbed by nothing and surprised by nothing. They are fully persuaded that everything that happens, no matter how difficult or unintelligible, is divine work; they need nothing more.

All possible objections vanish into nothingness before the word: THERE IS A GOD.

The proud might disdainfully dismiss faith as a weakness, but it has the gift of bringing peace to the human spirit and, judged in the clear light of calm reason, it is not a weakness.

Reason judges faith worthy of the highest praise, and acknowledges that it makes us much greater than knowledge itself does.

In fact, limiting ourselves to our case, we are simply making effective in the human spirit an undeniable truth taught by reason itself: the existence of God. Our aim is to make people understand this truth in perfect coherence with their thoughts and affections, without any contradiction whatsoever in their reasoning, and without any hesitation or the abandonment of this truth due to a weak mind or spirit. Indeed, if we keep firmly in our hearts that a God of infinite wisdom and goodness exists and provides for the world, we can never doubt that the government of the world could be ever badly directed

Faith — I mean Christian faith — requires and infuses a wonderful strength of spirit, much greater than naked truth can, which is known by reason alone. When reason feels that human strength is weakening in following reason's teachings, it calls

in other accessory and particular reasons and even employs flattery.

Strength of spirit is great in those people who persistently rule their lives with only one general principle. They need no other supports; they remain coherent with themselves, and overcome all doubts, obstacles and the subtleties and errors of passion. It is an obvious and certain observation that the weaker our understanding and character are, the more we need supports and accessory reasons to live a moral life.

This is substantially what constitutes the moral weakness of people, and a definite symptom of this weakness is the fact that general principles, although understood at the moment, are seen to have little value in guiding their lives. People need a great many accessory, partial reasons to support their spirit in all directions. To solve at once all the difficulties that come to their spirit does not help them: they need a particular solution for each difficulty and adapted in such a way that it comforts them.

Thank God therefore that upright, truthful and faithful people conquer the world with a simple faith in God's existence and attributes. The world may consider them simple-minded and poor in good judgment, but they have received a strong spirit and lively mind. One principle alone, the principle of God's existence, and one belief alone, in the divine word, are worth more to them than all trumped-up human knowledge. One principle, splendidly true, totally clear and supreme, suffices for them as a guiding light. By means of this

principle their intellect does not hesitate; their spirit causes no conflict; they are guided by their own reason, and even the world itself obeys their will that is in conformity with the will of God.

I have often reflected that the whole difference separating great and extraordinary human beings from ordinary people is simply a greater degree of this strength of spirit I am talking about.

Great and enduring enterprises can be conceived only by people governed by few and sublime principles, because the force that these maxims exercise on them raises their whole spirit to a sublime degree and, as if some divinity (so the Greeks expressed themselves) were speaking in their spirit, they abandon themselves to enterprises full of counsel, almost without taking counsel. They do not hesitate: they handle dangers with complete safety, because they feel nothing; the only thing on their minds is the noble purpose on which they have set their sights. They conquer all other people, even nature itself, by greater uniformity and by constancy of action, and by the degree of that feeling that adds such mysterious and irresistible power to the few, universal thoughts they have.

In this way the Christian is constantly ruled by only one great idea whose universality absorbs and includes all other ideas. It is not a Greek dream that the divinity gives them by the light of this idea. The idea is so powerful that it sets them solidly and un-shakeably above all other humans who are overwhelmed by an excessive quantity of untrustworthy human ideas, and whose uncertain

spirit is tossed to and fro, wavers, often loses heart, and even falls into despair.

4.

THE PATH OF REASON

In following the *path of faith*, we acquire such great strength of spirit that we adore undisturbed what we do not understand in divine conduct. If this path deserves the reasonable praise we have given it, the path of reason can also prove very

helpful to the upright person who follows it.

By 'path of reason' I mean our search for the particular reasons that supreme Providence follows in its ordering of creation.

Very few people are able to follow this sublime and difficult path safely.

In fact, the journey can be undertaken in three ways, which are like three distinct paths.

The first way to use our reason about Providence (the first of these three paths) is followed by people who investigate the divine dispositions with a guilty spirit and with a stubborn and proud mind. They are searching solely for something that will enable them to deny or deform the God whom they do not love and of whom, in their perpetual agitation, they have a great fear.

There are people who seem continually to think that it might be possible to show that God does not exist. The sad and fatal outcome of their knowledge is the great darkness of the endless doubts into which they have sunk. Or else, deprived of every joyful ray of truth, their sole consolation is a fleeting moment of dim light provided by a troubled imagination. As the days go by, they understand less and less of the wisdom that moves and gives life to the universe, and they bitterly and fearfully blaspheme the divinity from which that life-giving wisdom emanates.

On the other hand, those who are not slaves to passion and vice and have not yet been introduced

into the Lord's dwelling, that is, they still do not know about true piety, can learn something about the invisible attributes of their Creator. They can attain the truth through the wisdom visible in creatures, and by following the path of reason.

This path however is not safe. Although human reason is the offspring of divine reason, it is short-sighted and liable to error when abandoned to itself. The light of reason as such is infallible, but we who use it are fallible when we apply it. Consequently, those who are forced to make for themselves or, of their own choice have made a law to use only reason as their sole guide can certainly make out the traces imprinted on all things of the wisdom on which they depend. However, they can meet with serious difficulties that disturb them and endanger the good result of their meditation

This government is so far-reaching that the human mind can never conceive all the possible problems, all the possible difficulties that present themselves; our mind can never understand the depth of wisdom needed for and present everywhere in such government. It is purely accidental that we apply our mind to undoing the knots and solving the puzzles which our thought encounters; it is also accidental that we are dealing with these particular puzzles and knots rather than others, because this also is not subject to our will.

Consequently, if the problems we encounter are beyond the power of our understanding, what will we do if our only help is such an ignorant guide?

Our understanding, in which alone we believe,

will in this case cause us to risk deviating from the truth. Strictly speaking, this temptation does not make us give in, but we give in very often through our weakness. Although natural reason is short-sighted and liable to error, the cause of our ruin is solely the will, never reason. Our human will abuses the insufficiency, ignorance and obscurity of reason and most foolishly and culpably uses these blunt weapons against the Supreme Being.

But the process does not stop there: faith leads us back to reason, which, when strengthened and supported by faith, becomes a gentle teacher and infallible guide.

We have here the third way of using our intelligence, a way that is far better than the first two. It makes intelligence become a wide, royal road that does not cause us to get lost in a fearful forest of errors, as the first way does that I described. Nor does it lead us, as the second way does, with uncertain and dangerous steps along tortuous, untrustworthy paths, with a very uncertain outcome. Instead, it leads directly to the desired goal for which we are making. This third way therefore, in which we can use our intelligence, is a completely open, clearly visible and straight path that ends in heaven — even on earth it gives us complete rest and a taste of the bright light of truth.

5.

IN THE PLAN OF THE UNIVERSE THERE
IS
SOMETHING INFINITE AND MYSTERIOUS

But if holy people drew the valuable knowledge of consolation from trustworthy, heavenly enlightenment, they did not await this enlightenment in culpable indolence, making no effort themselves. On the contrary they continually meditated on and scrutinized divine Scripture. It was only by reading the Scriptures that the true Israelites obtained relief in their slavery from their evils.

The royal Prophet proclaimed: 'When the princes plotted against him and sought his ruin, the only relief he found was applying himself to deep meditation on the justifications of the Lord' (Psalm 118(119): 23). This holy and wise King was persuaded that 'only then will nothing trouble him, nothing disturb him, when his mind has been able to penetrate deeply all the divine precepts' (ibid, 6). However, no matter how much we meditate on divine dispositions and diligently study the inspired Scriptures we will never understand all their wisdom and all the laws by which God governs and corrects living and non-living things. We are not capable of seeing the reasons for all events; in short, whatever knowledge we acquire will never render faith entirely useless.

It would be vain to think so. Scripture itself, whose task is to teach us the counsels of Providence, restrains our enthusiasm and the excessive boldness of our desire to know.

It instructs us that even as our mind penetrates the

highest knowledge, it will in the end always come to the point beyond which it cannot go, yet it will vainly and fruitlessly try to go.

This impassable point lies between what is finite and the absolute infinite; it marks a limit for every essentially limited creature. However, the divine thoughts that dictate the universe's path include not only everything on this side of that final point of created intellects but everything stretching beyond it. Thus, the intention of uncreated wisdom reveals itself like light spreading and diffused over all contingent natures. It gradually spread across all the determined ages (like luminous threads joined together to form one cord), became weaker and, over an immeasurable distance, began to disappear from mortal view. Finally, it was totally removed when engulfed by but not confused with the sea of eternal light.

6.

THE FIRST LIMITATION: REASON DOES NOT HAVE A POSITIVE IDEA OF GOD

The perfections that all creatures possess are predominantly accidental, so that they may or may not have them. For example, intelligent and moral creatures can be wise or unwise, good or bad. But in the concept of the Supreme Being it is absolutely impossible for these perfections to be absent; they are substantial and essential to him, they are (to express myself more accurately) his very being. From the examination of all limited nature, therefore, no image or picture of such a Being can be extracted, because such a thing is not found in the whole of nature. Hence, we cannot see *what he is*, although we can see *that he is*. The mode of the divine nature is totally hidden from our understanding, although our understanding strives to find and see the mode. It remains always an object of our faith, separated from us by a dense, impenetrable curtain. Until this veil is removed by the direct communication that he will make of himself to us, we must adore his inaccessible light with profound humility and trust.

Creatures certainly reflect back to us many rays of his glory because he pours out on them his perfections (in so far as these can be communicated) and traces of his wisdom. But his *being* is not seen anywhere or found in creation. According to St. Paul's teaching, the world is only a kind of mirror, an enigma of the divinity, and because the only thing visible is the world, we cannot see the divinity as it is, nor its naturally most real being; all we see are the few rays reflected from this mirror, but reflected with that obscurity which makes them an enigma.

We see therefore how true and profound is divine Scripture's description of the searcher after wisdom: 'He who in his heart investigates the ways of wisdom, is like someone in love who contemplates his beloved through the window vents and the cracks in the door, who accommodates himself next to her house and sets his rustic home against the walls and under the same gutter. But he may not pass over the threshold of this sublime dwelling. Nevertheless, he is blessed by this alone, to be protected by the same roof against the heat of the sun and the dampness of the rain' (Sir. 14: 24, 27).

Created things mirror the divinity only in so far as they have and share in the divine perfections. The level of their participation in these perfections is proportionate to their own perfection, but because they all have a finite nature, they can never participate fully in the perfection of the Supreme Being. By this limited participation created things can indicate his existence but cannot give us the positive idea of the immense Being, whose essence is *subsistent perfection itself*, of which there is no copy or example. Note carefully: what creatures lack in perfection is essential to God. The difference therefore between shared perfection and divine perfection is the positive idea of the divinity. His essence remains hidden; not even some likeness has been revealed to us. Our inability to have a concept of this perfection, which creatures lack but is substantial to the divinity, deprives us of what is substantial to God; in other words, we lack the positive idea of God. However,

we do see the perfections of the Supreme Being in tiny quantities and within certain limits.

Created things are therefore certainly a large mirror of the divinity but a mirror that presents the image as a puzzle, that is, in a dark, mysterious way, as a kind of code, which has this particular property: it cannot mean any of the things we know or are knowable; it means only one, supreme, most perfect thing which we do not see, but whose necessary existence however is known in the code. Only this particular thing can explain the code, written brilliantly in the whole of nature, shining before us and ceaselessly striking us with its light so that, adoring, we may believe.

7.

**SECOND LIMITATION OF HUMAN REASON:
IT CANNOT ENCOMPASS THE INFINITE**

If no creature, with the power of their natural intelligence, can *perceive* God, who is the beginning and end of the universe, which of us can judge and censure such a being in his government? But that is not all. God cannot be *perceived* or *positively conceived* because none of the creatures we can perceive has what is essential to God, namely, the identification of essence with perfection. Furthermore, no human being can encompass him because he is actually and in every respect *infinite*.

For this reason, I posit the following as the second limitation of the human mind: it can never clearly know the last link that suspends, so to speak, the universe in eternity and gives rise to the sublime counsel of Providence that governs it. This limitation can be expressed as:

FINITE INTELLIGENCE CANNOT
KNOW PERFECTLY THE ABSOLUTE
INFINITE.

We must note that God communicates something of his infinity in some way to all his works so that the infinite is found in the whole of creation: it intermingles with the finite, in space, in time, in substances, in ideas, and in the modifications of things — modifications that are inconceivable without an identical something to form their subject. In short, wherever our thought wishes to penetrate more deeply, it can become lost in limitless regions that stretch to a horizon beyond its gaze and expand into immensity. What mind can

make an accurate judgment about the government of such a kingdom whose extent it cannot encompass or fully know its nature?

It is precisely in speaking about the way divine Providence distributes good things and evils that the book of Job informs us about the greatness of God and about our own littleness. The book speaks of *the secrets of his wisdom*, and calls his *law multiple*, composed of countless relationships which only God can know and reveal.

‘Will you perhaps understand the traces of God, and find the almighty in a complete, perfect way? Know that he is higher than the heavens and how will you reach them? He is deeper than hell, and how will you know it? His measure outstretches the earth and the breadth of the sea. If he re-arranged everything and compressed it all into one atom, who would contradict him?’ (Job 11: 7-10)

God’s power and wisdom are of the same immensity as his nature — his power and his strength exceed the limits of all created natures. No matter how great these natures are, no matter how much they stimulate a feeling of wonder and a concept of sublimity in our limited mind, they can never lead us to an adequate understanding of the being who is beyond every material limit and whose extension is spiritual. His wisdom must not cause us amazement if it overwhelms and exceeds ours. It extends throughout the whole of the universe; it is exceedingly deep in its disposition of human destinies. Hence the Apostle exclaims: ‘How inscrutable are his judgments and unsearchable his ways!’ (Rom. 11: 33)

8.

THIRD LIMITATION OF HUMAN REASON: THE INTELLECTUAL FACULTIES OF EVERY HUMAN BEING HAVE AN ACCIDENTAL NATURE

Mental power is given by God to each human being in such a determined quantity that those who possess it cannot measure or ascertain the relationship between their power and the difficulty of the questions that present themselves for solution.

It is absurd to presume we can solve all questions indifferently with our own direct reason. On the other hand it is reasonable and necessary that we sometimes doubt even the solution which seems correct.

One thing we must constantly do: we must accept as certain that there is always a solution to doubts about divine Providence, even if we cannot always find it, or find the true solution. The ability to show that there must be a solution differs totally from the ability to say what the solution is. We must be satisfied if the following thesis is demonstrated: 'Any event whatsoever that seems contrary to divine goodness or divine wisdom can and must always have a hidden reason which, if revealed to us, would settle every doubt we have, or would show the event to be in accord with divine perfections.' We must not claim more than this or that the reason be always given us. It must be enough to know that there is a reason because there must be a reason.

Hence no one can presume to understand the reason for all that happens in the universe. God is indeed justified in addressing the above words to us, as if he were telling each of us: 'If, after your birth, it was you who constructed the world, the task would have conformed to your limited mind from which it came. But you did not create and establish this universe. I made it before you were born, I who created the world and assigned to you a certain level of understanding, which you can indeed use but not increase in the slightest way. I gave it to you as I willed, just as I willed to assign a discernment confined within the limit of feeling to the animals, which lack reason. It was I who determined the relationship between your understanding and what can be known, and you cannot change this relationship.

Indeed, you cannot know it in any way. To know it, you would have to know all knowable things, because the relationship between two terms cannot be known unless the terms themselves are known. The world does not depend on your mind, nor are the times accommodated to your puniness. In space there are parts you have not seen, like the great depths and the heavens; in time there are things included in the great plan but hidden from you, like those beyond death. If you do not know all the parts of the world that are arranged as I, not you, want them, how can you know how much the sublimity and beauty of my plan surpass and exceed your intelligence?'

9.

**FOURTH LIMITATION OF HUMAN REASON:
THE ONLY ENTIA IT CAN KNOW
ARE THOSE THAT COME TO IT
INDEPENDENTLY
OF IT AND ARE OFFERED FOR ITS
CONTEMPLATION**

The human mind cannot produce for itself any knowledge if the matter of the knowledge is not given it by a foreign cause.

If we were abandoned totally to ourselves, to our internal forces that compose our nature, and were not touched or affected by any of the forces outside us, we could never begin to move ourselves and carry out the smallest act of our intelligence. In this state of isolation from other subsistent beings, we would not take one step or conceive one thought, even if the Almighty preserved us for thousands of years. Everything in us would remain at total rest, and the least movement in our mind would be impossible. There would be nothing to move us and no terms to arrive at. It would be a life deprived of motion, so that our existence would be like non-existence.

Hence, without something totally different from us, we would never come to know anything. This original immobility is revealed by observation: human activity, no matter how great we suppose it to be, never initiates any movement without a

stimulus. Once movement has been received, we can maintain, direct and increase it.

But what are the external, material beings? Who applies them to our sense organs, and why do we receive the impression of some rather than others? We cannot believe that brute beings are able by their own power to present themselves to us and stimulate our senses, nor can we think that when we are born and find ourselves surrounded and stimulated by certain material beings rather than others, it is the effect of their own free choice because some of them wanted to be closer to us! We must look outside these external beings for the sufficient reason why some rather than others strike our senses on some occasion and in one way rather than another. We must in fact look for an intelligent, free principle, superior to them, which controls, guides and uses them according to its judgment as instruments for our intellectual development.

How then can we take pride in our human knowledge? Can a book take pride in itself when its very contents were written by another?

We cannot have any knowledge unless we receive from another, from a being outside us, a being that can apply stimuli to our understanding and provide the objects of knowledge. These objects, co-existing with us, are totally independent of us and are given us according to the good pleasure of him who has created us and, together with us, created the universe so that it might become the object and stimulus of human understanding and initiate human activity.

In a true sense, therefore, we are all simply disciples, and one is our teacher, the Lord of all things, God.

But because we have naturally the general limitation of knowing nothing if the elements of our knowledge are not presented to us, our knowledge is totally restricted to what another wishes to teach us. Hence abuse of our knowledge is a sad mistake, as if we totally owned it and could use it to battle against our divine teacher and master, who must surely laugh at the strange know-all who know precisely nothing more than what the divine master first gives them and what he teaches them and determines for them with firm limits.

All human beings therefore receive their knowledge from another. This alone is a humiliation, a dependence that, whether we like it or not, subjects us to the Almighty, and obliges us to glorify him with our existence and with the knowledge we misuse against him.

10.

THE KNOWLEDGE OF TIMES AND PLACES IS BEYOND THE POWER OF HUMAN REASON

In the orders of nature and of grace, God generally keeps hidden those particular things that depend on the complex of events, and we cannot deduce them through reasoning because we do not know the complex. Among such things, as Scripture tells us, is the determination of times and places, a determination that is indeed very relevant to the ordained movement of the universe. In Ecclesiastes we read, 'God has assigned to all things their proper time, and every- thing takes place under heaven, contained in their fixed place' (Eccles 3:1).

The distribution of these times and the allocation of these places certainly depend on the law of fittingness to the whole. Only one thought could establish this distribution, a thought that could include everything at once, because the great whole is only gradually attaining its completion through its places and times.

The knowledge of times that the Eternal reserves to himself makes the works of the Lord wonderful and great in our sight, although we sometimes see events end abruptly in a way totally different from

the way our own human providence was intently directing them.

Indeed, at every moment we are taken by surprise, as it were, by the Almighty. We never know or can ever know the future with certainty, nor foresee the results of our own actions, or discern how to deal with new circumstances that arise; we search totally in vain for ways to avoid them and protect ourselves against them.

But circumstances are continually changing, and we are caught in situations and complex predicaments that are always new and for which we have no skill. Only when things come to their pre-established and inevitable end do we become aware of the true situation and remove the blindfold from our eyes. With the pressure gone, we can now think calmly about everything that has happened and even see it as most natural, we can reproach ourselves for not foreseeing such natural things, and because we consider our lack of vision as purely accidental, we can intend and hope to be more vigilant next time. In this way we can go on deluding and deceiving ourselves from one event to another as a punishment for not paying attention to the divine words and not knowing that we lack the key to events, that is, the knowledge of times.

We are never spectators at one and the same moment of a whole series of events, as the Eternal is, to whom both past and future times are present. To us, who are as changeable as time itself, individual events present themselves as separate from each another; they appear briefly on the stage of the present moment and then are gone. Their

wonderful connection is seen only when they have for all intents and purposes passed and cannot be recalled; they are no longer under our control and are consigned uselessly to our memory.

While each event was present, we were totally occupied with it as if no other event would follow; its action upon our sense-nature, the sounds that sometimes accompanied it, the complexity of its parts, the speed at which it passed, the thousand hopes it raised and the passions it set in motion, all these things conspired to prevent us thinking about the uncertain future; on the contrary, they made us presumptuous, bold and over-confident, as if we had been dreaming of kingdoms and treasure but were suddenly woken by the light of the sun that dissipated all our illusions. If only we could undeceive ourselves for once!

Our task is to learn from experience and contemplate how, throughout all the centuries of the world's existence, God has sublimely guided countless series of facts, which have always confounded the futile hopes of the wicked, even when appearances seemed to support them in their boasts. This should lead us to glorify God's supreme wisdom, and humbly proclaim: 'O the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways! For who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who has been his counsellor? Or who has given a gift to him, to receive a gift in return? For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be the glory forever. Amen' (Rom. 11: 33-36).

11.

DISPOSITIONS OF SPIRIT NECESSARY TO PENETRATE THE SUPREME DIVINE DESIGNS

But if there are some who in their arrogance wish to argue with God as if with their equal, and maliciously seek to find defect in his dispositions, we should not be surprised if the Lord abandons them to the illusions of their temerity and allows them to become entangled and small-minded in their thoughts.

Hence, the book of Wisdom, which is a treatise on the sublime, provident dispositions of the Lord, begins with the precepts that will enable us to penetrate those sublime designs with the light of our mind.

It tells us 'that for this end we must principally love justice' and then 'that we must have a good and kind heart, inclined to sense good and principally to sense good of God, as of him whose concept alone brings every love with it'. It desires 'that we look for the Lord in the simplicity of our heart', that is, not diverted by a particular interest, or by some passion that stimulates and blinds us. Instead, we

are to silence all the voices of self-love and walk directly and openly towards the truth. If we think about divine things with a mind full of wrong affections, we are tempting God. God is found only by those who do not tempt him and appears to those who have faith in him. Perverse thoughts bring division from God but tried virtue corrects the beginners, that is, sets on the road of virtue even those who might not have great intelligence to follow it. Wisdom cannot enter into an evil soul, into anyone who cunningly seeks to harm others. Nor can it dwell in a body subject to sin where the mind is continually agitated and menaced by the winds of passion. Moreover, the Holy Spirit desires frankness and avoids the pretense of a contrived and equivocal teaching and withdraws from thoughts that lack understanding. And if a soul that he has entered does not act righteously, he makes it feel remorse (Cf. Wisdom 1).

These are the admirable dispositions of heart that prepare the mind to penetrate divine secrets. The mind goes forward, moved by the will and guided by the will's affections. David therefore truthfully proclaimed: 'Lord, those who love your law enjoy a great peace and never take scandal or offence at all that happens to them, or that they see happen in the universe' (Psalm 118 (119)).

BOOK TWO

THE LAWS GOVERNING THE DISTRIBUTION OF TEMPORAL GOODS AND EVILS

1.

THE PROBLEM OF EVIL

When we see good people suffering, we must consider whether they are suffering because they are good or because they are human beings. We see them suffering but can we be sure that the cause of their sufferings is their virtue? If we have no reason to believe that their virtue is the cause of their sufferings, we cannot say that virtue causes pain and affliction. On the contrary, we must say that it is humanity that suffers; no one suffers because they are virtuous but as a human being.

But why does humanity suffer? As creatures of an excellent God, should we not be free from all suffering of any kind?

This brings us up against the problem of the origin and nature of evil.

The first objection asks how evil can be possible under a most Holy and perfect being. The objection indicates an ABSENCE OF KNOWLEDGE, that is, it is not known how to reconcile God's goodness with the evil in God's creatures. The idea of a being endowed with infinite perfection seems at first sight to exclude even the possibility of every evil: if the perfection of this Being is infinite, it must surely fill all things with itself? And because the infinite perfection of this Being fills and pervades all things as well as all times and all the space of the universe, evil ought to be eliminated from nature and, as it were, find no place or object where it can reside. This is how the narrow human mind reasons.

We note first of all: the objection is not directed against the existence of this or that particular evil but excludes the very *possibility of evil*. Reduced to its ultimate terms it can be stated as follows: evil is impossible because a most perfect Ens is necessary.

2.

THE NATURE OF EVIL

There was a time when it was very difficult indeed to answer this objection; it seemed insoluble to anyone who confronted it directly. This was before St. Augustine. He had found and fully revealed the nature of evil in his refutation of the Manicheans, who had fallen into the error of the two principles.

It is true that even before St. Augustine the philosopher Epictetus had known that evil is not a nature and had given this very fine opinion: 'Just as a target is not the cause of error, so the nature of evil does not exist in the world'. Here he acutely notes that evil consists in the failure of an action to attain its appropriate term, precisely in the same way that an archer fails when he misses his target. To hit the target, skill and expertise are necessary as a kind of actualisation of the power of it but to miss the target no skill and expertise are required.

Later on, St. Athanasius had written: 'Neither from God nor in God, nor from the beginning does evil exist. There is no substance of evil. But human beings, imagining and thinking the *privation of good*, began to construct for themselves what evil is and freely pretended that the things that were not, were.'

After him, St. Basil also demonstrated that he knew that evil is a privation and nothing more, comparing it to death and darkness.

Despite this, the teaching was not sufficiently clarified and discussed before St. Augustine. He developed it fully with his very sharp mind and thus annihilated forever the system of the two principles.

He irrefutably demonstrated that evil is not a real positive entity; God with his infinite perfection and holiness fills everything with himself without any need to enter evil, as it were, because evil is not one of the things that subsist. Hence St. Augustine demonstrated that in order to explain how evil arose we do not need to admit a first positive principle to produce it.

Nowadays, the objection cannot be given any great weight because the truth that *evil is solely privation of good* is commonly accepted and no longer controversial. Evil has no positive cause but originates either from a defective form by which an ens does not have its full nature, or from a nature's weakness and slowness of operation. Clearly, this weakness and slowness of operation never happens in the most perfect Being; his operation is as perfect as his nature so that one enters into the

other, and this perfect Being and its act are one most simple thing. It follows from this that the creature of finite substance is the cause of all evils. Because the act of being is not essential to the creature, it can receive this act imperfectly. Similarly, because potency and second act are different from being, they can be defective and deficient.

Evil therefore is not in the essence of things but in their natural development or in their operation and passion. These three things can be contained under the name 'act', or even 'operation' in a general sense. Thus, when the operation of contingent entia departs from its right path and directs itself to a term different from that established for it and required by their essence, there is evil in the operation.

The whole act is not evil, because in its being it is always a positive thing. Hence, its being is not evil if, as I said, evil is negative, not positive, that is, privation of good. Thus, in every act that fails to attain the end assigned to it, there is something *positive* and good and also something *negative*, which forms what is called evil. The *positive* element, always present in an act, is, as I said, the being itself of the act, and being is good. The *negative* element that forms evil is the *term* that the act should have naturally attained but did not; instead it terminated in something else and therefore failed.

3.

GRANTED THAT NATURE IS FINITE, THE POSSIBILITY OF EVIL IS NECESSARY

One may ask, if God is all-powerful and is supreme goodness and wisdom, why did he not make creatures so perfect that they would necessarily never fail in their operation?

A reply to this difficulty requires us to examine the nature of created things, in which evil is found as in its proper subject. We need to understand that if God, in creating the universe, could not make a repeat of himself, the universe and everything in it had to be limited.

LIMITATION IS IN THE NATURE OF ALL THINGS OUTSIDE GOD. This is a fundamental law of creation and the key to divine Providence.

A consequence of the principle that all creatures, as creatures, must have a limited existence is that they must also have a limited operation, and because such an operation is accidental, it must be liable to failure.

The gift of having dominion over one's actions, of being able to choose this or that action according to preference, is an excellent gift. The nature that receives this gift has a very noble quality that allows it to perfect itself and also be a partner, as it were, of the Creator in the task of perfecting itself. But in order to have this noble quality, it had to have the limitation that enabled it to do the opposite, that is, to fail in the work of its own perfection. Even if God had wanted, he could not have created this excellent nature without its being subject to defect.

We see therefore that *the possibility of physical and moral evils is joined to the nature of everything that is not God himself*. The very nature of all created things and of everything that can be created requires some limitation proper to each, and this limitation opens the door to the possibility of evils.

4.

THE SOURCE OF ALL EVILS

The constitutive element of human nature is its freedom for good and evil. This freedom is an excellent endowment because it is the principle of *merit*. But the limitation of this excellent endowment is such that it can be directed to evil because merit cannot be conceived except on condition that demerit can also exist. If we consider human nature *per se*, it can, by its own movement, pass from a state of limitation to a state of evil.

But we also know from the traditions of the human

race that moral evil preceded physical evil and that it was intelligent man who abused his free choice and consequently incurred guilt before God. Man, thus passed from being *limited* to being *wicked*, although the Creator had structured him for the perfection of virtue. Here then we have the source of all evils.

Once *moral evil* had been introduced in this way on earth, it is easy to explain how physical evil subsequently found the way open before it, because there is a strict, necessary relationship between the moral and physical orders, between moral and physical evil.

Indeed, due to this relationship, physical evil is understood as necessary and desired by divine perfection and holiness, which cannot allow moral evil to go unpunished.

Only physical evil, which punishes the sinful creature with sensible sufferings, can vindicate the divine holiness that the creature had attempted to insult and (unsuccessfully) to destroy and annihilate. Only chastisement re-establishes the order of justice infringed by sin. In this way, guilty and punished human beings give glory to divine greatness because, when they were just and rewarded for their justice, they had not wished to give it.

We see therefore that the evil found on earth cannot in the least harm or contradict divine holiness and perfection, whether the evil is considered *in its nature* or considered in *its*

possibility or is the result of its passage from possibility to *existence*.

5.

WHY THE EVILS IN THE WORLD?

After the father of the human race had failed in the way he acted, why should the evils that punished his crime fall also on his descendants? Doesn't this seem contrary to divine justice?

The evils that have come down to us from the first father of the human race have not been positively inflicted by God.

God did not deprive us of something belonging to our nature. It is true that he took from the first man-sinner the supernatural gifts he had given him but these gifts do not in any way belong to human nature; in fact it would be far truer to say that we ourselves wickedly rejected the gift of grace rather than that God had taken it back. It was after all we who made ourselves culpable and thus placed ourselves in a state in which the generous union of God with us became intrinsically impossible, precisely because essential holiness cannot exist where there is sin.

Even the damage left in human nature was not an effect of some *positive operation* by God, but of natural causes and of the sinful way we operate.

Sin causes the human will to deteriorate and weaken. Consequently, the will of the first father, after his culpable transgression, was twice as weak as it was previously: it had lost *supernatural strength* because sin truly stripped man of the supernatural gifts. He also lost much of his *natural strength* because fault is also something contrary to nature and thus wounds nature.

Hence, Adam's will was weakened not only in comparison with what it was previously but also in comparison with its natural perfection, because human nature, free of all sin, certainly has much greater moral strength than sinful human nature.

We must keep in mind that we, fallen and reduced to the state of sin, can no longer raise ourselves, can no longer justify ourselves by ourselves alone. Moreover, no law of justice obliges God to restore us. Such restoration would be an act of infinite

greatness and, if we consider the matter carefully, would seem to be an act greater than creation itself. In fact, according to the law of simple justice, the Creator had to inflict on the rebellious creature a punishment proportionate to the fault.

It has been demonstrated that both the moral and physical state of parents have an influence on the state of their children. Generation is not accomplished by the body alone but much more through the power and energy of the soul. Consequently, if man, after sinning, was left with a very weak will, incapable of ruling his animal inclinations, it was in keeping that the children inherited the same defect, even if through the mercy of God, the father and mother had themselves been fully justified.

Hence, propagation of physical evil from parent to offspring is not difficult to explain, and in the case of the propagation of moral evil, this comes of itself because it consists in the prevalence of diseased animality over the weakened personal will.

6.

WHY DID GOD PERMIT THE SIN OF THE FIRST PARENT?

We still need to see whether some element of divine goodness is perhaps harmed by God's permitting the first parent's sin. After the offence had been committed, punishment was necessary; and

the effect of the punishment, which is moral and physical evil, had to pass into the descendants through the natural link between parent and offspring.

If God had wanted Adam's sin not to happen he could certainly have prevented it without harm to Adam's freedom. He could certainly have helped the intelligent free creature not to offend. God had the extraordinary power to move freedom for a certain purpose without destroying it. Revelation tells us as much, and reason itself convinces us. Anyone who did not grant this, would have an imperfect concept of divine omnipotence. We may indeed find it very mysterious in what way human freedom is joined to God's omnipotence, but both must be granted.

So if God could have prevented man's first offence and removed this stain from him and from all his family, and could have also removed all the evils sadly caused by the stain, why did he not do so? Surely this was fitting to his supreme goodness?

This is precisely what I affirm. At first sight, a thing can seem an act of goodness but is a cruel fact. On the other hand, there are actions which at first make us want to protest loudly against their cruelty and barbarism, but when examined more deeply, contain a rare piety and exquisite affection. Only wisdom can guide goodness to its ultimate effect and true fulfilment. A goodness that lacks wisdom and is short-sighted and of little consequence cannot provide for what is remote and is not seen. But a wise goodness that grasps many and distant things, sometimes seems harsh and neglectful of

partial goods. In fact however, it is not neglecting these goods; it is simply and gently by-passing them for the time being so that it can absorb them later on, because they have now increased a thousand-fold, into the great whole that goodness always contemplates.

A ruler's goodness equals the sum of the virtue and happiness he procures for the republic minus the sum of misery and vices. To know therefore how to judge correctly whether permission of Adam's sin pertained to the prudence of the best of rulers, we would need to know all the consequences of the sin and the new order of things that divine omnipotence had drawn from the sin. We would need to make a comparison between the new order established after the first offence and the order of things that would have followed if Adam had remained innocent. We would also need perfect knowledge of the primal order destroyed at its birth by the man-sinner, and our mind would have to be so powerful and penetrative that it could understand the present system of the human race which is bound up with the system of the universe.

If anyone thinks he possesses all this knowledge, grasps the whole mass of things and can say whether the Eternal had done well or badly in establishing the present order and letting the ancient collapse, such a person could make the above objection with some force. But if he does not presume so much, then why does the presumptuous mortal not adore, in silence, the greatness of the divine wisdom that is beyond him?

7

SINS AND EVILS IN THE PLAN OF PROVIDENCE

God, using the opportunity offered by Adam's sin,

established another more sublime, more magnificent order on the ruins of the old order, and that where fault abounded, grace has superabounded.

In the midst of temporal evils that have justly descended upon sinful man, the redemption that took away our sin and gave us grace has introduced into our spirit a new fount of contentment, flowing richly from a generous love of punitive justice and from the hope of a better, unending and most blessed life.

The pleasures and pains of the spirit are so infinitely superior to those of the body that people will often bear the greatest bodily sufferings to satisfy their spirit. Sometimes they will even sacrifice their greatest pleasures for a mere illusion of their imagination (which itself shows the strength of the spirit), or for a desire for revenge, for a great ambition, for an ecstasy of glory, for some miserable vanity, but much more for the immense attractions of virtue — they will even sacrifice their life and have no fear of prison or of the stake. It is the strength of the spirit that bears all these things, not only with firmness but readily and joyfully.

If through sin God has allowed evils to enter the body of his creatures, he has simultaneously made them much richer in goods of the spirit, which are worth more than the evils.

Permitting the evils was necessary so that we could have these great goods in abundance, just as war is necessary if there is to be victory. All this is a result of the natural limitation of things, which God could not change. We see therefore that our present state,

when strengthened by faith in the Restorer and his promises and by the energy of the spirit that this faith gives to the spirit, must be preferred to the state of the innocent human being who is incapable of experiencing the pleasure of sacrifice and acquiring the honour of victory over suffering. And we must prefer it in the measure that the pleasure of the spirit surpasses it in the battle with bodily pain, that is, infinitely, because the order of spiritual things is more noble in species, not in degree, than the order of bodily things, and because the strength of the intelligent spirit can be limitlessly increased over the instincts of animal nature.

I am concerned solely with the state of man relative to the goods and evils to which he is subject in this life, and my argument goes no further than this. It would be much easier to justify the divine counsel that permitted this first offence if we considered other parts of the new system and showed how superior this system was to the old system. We could, for example, demonstrate that an eternity of the most excellent goods has been prepared for man, and that he should strive to obtain them just as the striving for greater virtue is put before him. We could demonstrate the great wealth of holiness and happiness of just one human being, the man in whom all things have been restored, Jesus Christ, a holiness and happiness that in its greatness is worth far more than the whole human race. We recall how far the excellence of the new grace exceeds the old, and how the light of divine glory shines infinitely more brightly through the wisdom and goodness that are capable of drawing such great good from the creature's evil so that the virtue and happiness of so many just

people might be built up and increased, and that the universal order might become, granted the first conditions, not only the greatest and most beautiful but the best among possible orders; in other words, it would contain a maximum pure happiness, freed from all the unhappiness that had been necessary to obtain it. I say 'necessary' because of the limitation of created things — this limitation meant that there could be no definite kind of virtue or happiness without some opposing vice and unhappiness.

In the plan of created things, the eternal geometrician had assigned to himself certain conditions for solving a great problem of maxima and minima, that is, he found the way whereby the universe of predestined creatures contained the maximum happiness after the unhappiness had been subtracted — this is a just optimism. Can we really find an error in his calculation, and show that he has not chosen well?

WHY DO THE JUST SUFFER?

To sum up, temporal evils entered the world through an act of justice, as a punishment for the sin of the first parent.

The *efficient cause* (if we can call it that) of the first evil that existed on earth, *moral evil*, was the human being, who is naturally free; *physical evil* now became necessary as a punishment for moral evil.

God was the *permissive cause* of Adam's offence and decreed his penalty as an act of justice. The propagation of moral and physical evil from parent to offspring takes place through natural laws, through the constitution of the natures that compose the universe, and among these in particular is human nature, to which generation pertains.

Even in permitting the sin of the first parent, God performed an act of both *infinite wisdom* and *infinite goodness*. The infernal spirit, the enemy of the Creator, had wanted to use the offence to harm God's work, but God drew from the offence an order of things immensely more vast than the first order; it was a new and better order that gave him greater glory, and human beings greater happiness, an order that he established in fact by the redemption.

I come now to the question concerning the distribution of temporal evils and goods among human beings. The difficulty is the following.

According to what I said, it is not absurd that

temporal evils are present on this earth, and their presence must not cause us the least doubt about those sublime attributes that are fitting to the Creator and conserver of everything. But because in the life destined for us here below evils became necessarily mixed up with goods, we can ask whether these evils happen by chance without the Lord having any control and direction over them.

And if God does govern the goods and evils that are mixed together and follow one upon another in this world, will he not arrange that evils accompany vice, and goods accompany virtue, and in this way make life happy for the virtuous person, who is faithful to him and imitates him as much as he can in beneficence? Why do the guilty delight and triumph so often in their empty fortune, while the innocent suffer and are trodden under foot by the guilty?

Reflection on these complaints would be endless, because the complaints are more a weakness of the human senses than of human understanding. Among so many, I will choose the principal complaints, and these will open the way to an explanation of the excellent and most wise laws with which the Eternal moderates and dispenses all evils and goods for an end worthy of himself.

I will show therefore how in the final analysis evils are always reserved for vice, and goods for virtue, and we shall see that the completion of this sublime plan is wonderfully brought about through the short-lived irregularities that distress the weak and scandalize people who, with little faith in revelation, lack strength to believe in reason.

9.

TRULY, WHO SUFFERS UNJUSTLY?

No one can prove to others and to themselves that they have been ill-treated by the way goods and evils have been distributed on this earth.

Only the perfectly just can claim with any certainty that they are being unjustly afflicted by temporal calamities. In fact, only the just can at the most complain that they are suffering. The unjust, even those who are only a little unjust, must confess to be most justly humbled and punished. If they do not, they are by that very fact most unjust; their complaint itself justifies Providence, and deserves punishment because the complaint is rash, irresponsible and culpable.

I maintain that temporal suffering is also justly inflicted on those who are in the smallest way unjust because there is no proportion between *moral evil* and *temporal evil*. Moral evil has a kind of infinite nature because: 1. The authority whose law has been violated is infinite, 2. The moral order which has been assailed is necessary, and 3. God's dignity, which is offended, is infinite. Consequently, temporal penalties are not enough to punish even the least of formal injustices.

If therefore we cannot first prove ourselves totally just, any complaint against the Creator about the evils of this life is false and offensive. Can we truly prove ourselves just? Can we affirm this fearlessly

and without telling a lie? If we are ready to listen to divine Scripture, even our upright deeds are tainted in the sight of God (Is. 64); we are told that 'everyone is a liar' (Psalm 115 (116): 11) and 'if we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us' (I Jn. 1: 8). We must carefully examine our conscience and find an answer to our inconsiderate complaints against Providence.

Conscience either shows us or does not show us to be the sinners that we are. If it shows us, why do we complain about evils? If it does not show us and we declare ourselves just, this blindness, this lie of our proud heart, makes us truly deserving of every evil and the most severe chastisement.

Christians therefore have first of all a thousand reasons to persuade themselves never to complain about the evils they suffer. They do not have to tear themselves apart to justify for themselves the Providence that they ceaselessly bless and adore in everything. Moreover, those who are just with the justice of Christ do not in fact know their just state with total certainty; they need a special revelation for this. They say, and indeed can only say, what the Apostle Paul says: 'I am not aware of anything against myself, but I am not thereby acquitted' (I Cor. 4.4). Christians believe in Scripture, and Scripture says: 'Man does not know whether he is worthy of love, or hatred: but all things are kept uncertain for the time to come.' (Eccles. 9: 1-2). Hence, on earth only true Christians can merit the title 'just'; they clearly profess and declare themselves to be ignorant of their own justice, which they consider totally hidden in the hand of God.

10.

THE PERMISSION OF TEMPORARY EVILS IS NOT ONLY AN ACT OF JUSTICE BUT OF GOODNESS

Misfortunes and temporal sufferings have been purposefully left so that we might be healed. The universal disease from which we suffer is a rash sense we have of our nature separated from God through sin, a sense that is identical with pride, and multiplies concupiscence. The only way this disease can be cured is by misfortunes. These, together with the light of grace, were able to open our eyes to ourselves and to other creatures and see and sense our nothingness and the nothingness of other creatures in regard to our satisfaction. After repeated mauling and the daily experience of deep afflictions we were able to conclude finally: 'Peace is not found in any creature, so I turn to you, my God; in you alone is our souls' rest.'

Even if we had not suffered such a bitter experience, we might indeed have found our peace in God, but we would not have had so certain a feeling, or at least such a vivid feeling, like the feeling we have from our painful experiences. In these we felt that peace is not only in God but in God alone, and that all other natures are nothing, because they cannot give rest to intelligent nature, for which all other natures are made.

Human understanding reasons about the things

provided by the senses. It therefore had to use experience to remind human feeling, as it were, that human nature continually needs its Creator. This resulted in our having a greater knowledge of divine perfection on the one hand and of our own imperfection on the other: the glory of the supreme Creator shone with all its light in our minds. His victory over all creatures shone brilliantly before the eye of our intelligence and before the senses of a humanity humbled under his sublime and powerful hand.

But the splendour of this glory of God, seen by human nature, is precisely human nature's great salvation. Here is its contact and union with the Lord, because the grace of intelligent nature abounds in proportion to the extent to which the divine glory or power penetrates that nature, as it were.

If human knowledge begins from sense, and sense needs experience, God could not lead us to such perfect knowledge unless he allowed us to experience our own weakness and the evil we brought upon ourselves. There is no other way God could bring human beings to such a high degree of conviction of their own nothingness and of divine greatness, or indeed to such a sublime indication of their salvation and grace.

Did God have to abandon his own laws in order to train human nature and could he in fact do that; a stone cannot be moved by a force that is less than the inertia of the stone, nor can the feeling of an animal be moved by something it cannot feel; no action can be produced in a being unless the action acts on the being's forces or faculties. Should God

therefore have used miracles to prevent those very evils that alone could teach the composite being we call man?

Divine wisdom and goodness are indeed sublime! These two attributes have left us with temporal evils (which were all our work) in order to lead us to the highest perfection and greatest salvation.

The Christian needs to understand what Plato himself understood when he made use of the remnants of the first traditions: 'The Lord God of gods,' he said, 'having seen that the beings who were subject to generation had lost the most precious and most beautiful of things, decreed to subject them to a treatment that could both punish and regenerate them.' This would be more than sufficient to dispel the difficulties levelled against the distribution of evils. It was the state of our defective nature that made us subject to all evils. But these evils themselves are a remedy (confirmed by the grace of the Redeemer) for the ugly disease with which nature has infected itself through its own fault. Those people therefore who encounter few evils in life can naturally rejoice in having, as it were, accidental good fortune, while those who are burdened by many temporal misfortunes and temporal sufferings have been purposefully left so that we might be healed.

11.

TEMPORAL GOODS CONTINUALLY TEND TO BE
UNITED TO VIRTUE AND EVILS GENERALLY TO
UNITE TO VICE

We see at once (or think we see) that the order is not perfect, that is, not free from irregularities.

Many cruel actions are certainly not punished immediately, nor is every act of virtue rewarded. To be convinced of this, it is sufficient to look at the sun that shines every day on so many crimes and disasters that are arrogantly and boastfully inflicted on others. But this does not necessarily prove that there is no order of justice and that the order that must exist and is the only order that can exist is lacking. But if we find that in general the wicked are temporally punished and the virtuous temporally rewarded, it will be a consoling relief, and sufficient for us to dismiss our doubts and set us on the way to belief in the existence of an excellent mind that regulates the universe.

Indeed we have seen that death and the other

common evils to which the whole human race is subject originate from the limitation of the nature that suffers them and at the same time is separated from its author. It would therefore be unreasonable to search nature and natural virtue for some defense against these evils.

The first, accidental good is internal peace of spirit, and we saw that this natural reward is never absent from the virtue that respects the abstract dictate of justice, whenever we are obliged to apply the dictate. It is a kind of cult of God who is present (I would even say hidden) in the virtue and unknown to us.

Many other excellent consequences can be added, because the beings we encounter in the universe and to whom the dictate can be applied are our fellow human beings and ourselves. We have in fact no difficulty in seeing that those who are just to their fellow humans and to themselves avoid evils. Temporal goods follow more easily for such people than for those who are unjust towards themselves and their neighbour.

Virtue relative to one's fellow human beings consists in such a well-balanced spirit that it has a great love for the good of everybody and seeks this love through action, just as vice consists in ignoring the regard due to others and thinking only of oneself. By a law of nature, everyone prefers to vote for those who are known to love all people rather than vote for those who are known as the enemies of everyone; the former therefore receive the majority vote. As a result, those who love their

fellow humans have the greater probability of acquiring all goods.

It is true that others who simulate the same virtue can compete with them, but the pretense of virtue cannot be as frequent, constant and certain as genuine virtue. In some cases, those who have a greater love for the common good are sometimes overcome by other people's individual passions that have been unified by accidental causes, but this must be less frequent because less probable.

Whatever the state of the world and no matter how irregular the distribution of these goods, this tendency never ceases to function; it is *always* true that goods continuously have, as it were, a kind of inclination to unite with truth. Thus, even when a body is at rest, it is still drawn towards the earth. Consequently, if human goods are continuously drawn towards virtue, they must, as time passes, approach a regular distribution, and this balance must become more and more perfect, or must certainly drive events incessantly towards this perfection in the moral order, whatever the accidental disturbances the perfection may encounter.

12.

THE LAW OF PROBABILITY

We will see this better explained if we consider for a moment the *law of probability*, a sovereign law that presides over the execution of all the other laws of the universe.

If ninety balls, one sixth of them yellow, one third red, and half of them black, are put into a bag and then emptied out, there is no certainty which colour will come out first. There is a half probability that a black ball will come first, a third probability for a red, and a sixth probability for a yellow. Whatever colour emerges first, it is always an irregularity because that colour has, so to speak, no full right to emerge first; it has only a half, third or sixth part of a right, as it were. But if the ball is replaced in the bag, and the balls are taken out a great number of times (the colours being noted), their number for each colour

will approach the proportion of the colours, that is, a half of them will be black, a third red, and a sixth yellow. The more times the balls are taken out, the more the irregularity diminishes, and the regular pattern appears. Any accidental disturbance of this regular pattern does not prevent the continual fulfilment of the law that tends to make the colours of the extracted balls regularize themselves. And if the balls were drawn out *ad infinitum*, the law clearly indicates that every irregular assortment would disappear.

In the case of the universe therefore, those people who consider only particular cases cannot see its beauty; on the contrary they must see deformity because they meet inevitable irregularities. But those who consider a long series of events will discern a marvelously regular and symmetrical order.

For example, if we looked at a piece of very beautiful embroidery and examined each stitch or thread individually, we would see only one colour at a time without noticing the attractiveness of the whole; to appreciate the work we would have to hold it at a distance, and with our view encompassing the whole work enjoy all the colours that the intelligent embroiderer has put in their proper place.

In applying the laws of the universe, the great craftsman has arranged an irregularity in the detail but regularity in the whole, making the irregularities subject to his wonderful, eternal plan.

Therefore: we can see this in the division of

temporal goods and evils. If we see a virtuous person suffering, we see it as only one incident, but if we looked at the whole of his life, we might find many more goods than evils. If it is still not sufficient to see regularity when we consider someone's whole life instead of just one event or part, we can consider whole tribes. In doing this, we will see that the more prosperous tribes are those that have a greater total of virtues. The irregularities we see in an individual tribe will noticeably diminish if we consider many tribes instead of one; the irregularities will diminish even more if we consider whole nations. The history of nations constantly demonstrates that they have perished through excessive vice, and flourished through predominant virtue. If we look at the entire history of virtue and vice in the whole human race, we will see even less irregularities, and see them as decreasing still further in proportion that we examine ever longer and longer periods of the history.

13.

WHY DIVINE JUSTICE MIGHT DEFER THE PUNISHMENT OF THE EVIL-DOERS

Here I must make the subtle but true observation that Plutarch makes in his work entitled: 'Why divine justice sometimes defers the punishment of evil doers'.

According to Plutarch, God does not punish immediately, because he considers the totality of things, not things individually. He considers not so much what each of our actions would require, but rather what helps so that a perfect order of justice and goodness might shine out throughout the whole of our life.

When wicked people change their behaviour and are morally renewed, says Plutarch, they often advance in the path of virtue perhaps even further than they previously advanced in the way of vice. If God had removed such people, inflicting on them a prompt punishment at the moment of their first sin, there would certainly not have been the particular irregularity that the crime went unpunished for some time, but the great order that resulted from the crime would also have been lost. Indeed, in this case the claims of justice were strengthened in the totality of the life of each one and to the great advantage of each by the mercy shown by the legislator and by the earth's acquiring a greater sum of virtue.

According to this concept, Plutarch very appropriately likens the norm followed by divine

Providence in this particular situation to the law of the Egyptians which ordained 'that if a woman with child is condemned to death, the punishment must be deferred until she is delivered of her child'. He says there are many guilty people like this woman; they deserve death and are perhaps already sentenced by God. But they have, hidden within them, some beautiful action, and some magnanimous deed. Hence, the wisdom and goodness of the legislator requires postponement for a time of their punishment until they have produced the good fruit of virtue that is maturing in them unseen.

We are asking why punishment should be deferred for the guilty, because according to the law of justice this is an irregularity.

This may be so, but the irregularity is a partial irregularity that gives order to the totality; it is a transient irregularity that is corrected in the course of time, when it generates a more beautiful regularity.

We may ask whether this total, more beautiful regularity could not be obtained with the simple passage of time and thus avoid the need for the disorder and fleeting irregularity.

But this cannot so because the seeds of virtue and moral greatness in those who have at first been wayward but later, through extraordinary virtue, have become a light to humanity, would not have developed if at their first sin they had received the punishment they deserved. Hence divine Providence could not have used them as instruments (even unwilling instruments) to save

thousands of innocent people from a catastrophe, or punish thousands of guilty ones. Thus, their wickedness, which for some time remains unpunished and as such presents an apparent irregularity, becomes precisely a minister of justice and serves to strengthen the moral order much more extensively.

But why is this necessary?

This procedure is necessary because all creatures are limited, they cannot simultaneously unite all goods to themselves and escape all evils: while avoiding some, they fall into others, and while trying to obtain certain goods, they are naturally subject to the loss of others. Consequently, the great skill, as it were, that divine wisdom uses to correct and govern the things of this world is precisely to dispose them in such a way that greater goods come from the permission of evils.

14.

THE QUESTION IS COMPLETELY SOLVED IN THE SUPERNATURAL ORDER

In the last analysis, only Christians are given knowledge of the whole great plan of Providence and contemplate it in its entirety, with no part hidden from them. Only they know where they stand in the universe and all the links that bind human beings to the created things around them and to the eternal Creator who fills all things with himself.

On the other hand, non-believers, who lack the highest truths about their nature, do not know where they are, do not know the relationships that bind them to beings different from themselves. Like mindless animals, they vegetate without reason in the midst of a splendid universe, which solely for them is dark and inexplicable, just as they themselves remain inexplicable.

The philosophers who resemble unbelievers are those who are keen to draw knowledge from themselves and begin by cutting themselves off from even the possibility of thinking, when they impose on themselves the foolish law that God and revealed teachings must be excluded from all arguments. In this way they render themselves incapable of applying their minds to divine decisions, and instead make a

pact with their own pride to exclude wisdom. Anyone who reasons with them is forced to use a dry, disconnected kind of discourse because with their mole-like eyes that narrow in the presence of light, they cannot explain the totally visible magnitude of the most provident order of the world.

Up to this point my discussion of Providence relative to the distribution of goods and evils has done no more than sample, as it were, the subject. I was restricted to this lighter treatment because I needed to speak about natural virtue, that is, argue more according to the few, basic concepts of human philosophy than according to the fullness of Christian wisdom.

Now, however, I can go more deeply into the subject and discuss supernatural virtue, in that I am talking to Christians, to people who are not children relative to the truth but have become adults and are strengthened by the hidden things concerning divine and human nature as revealed by revelation.

Indeed, in the present state of sinful humanity what is needed and is important is solely what relates to supernatural virtue. Born as we are in sin, there can be no salvation without faith in the Redeemer, and this faith, this sole principle of salvation, is simply a supernatural relationship we enjoy. Everything in our present state therefore that leads us back to moral perfection and happiness is supernatural; all that is truly important for us, all that contains salutary instruction and not hypothetical speculation begins.

15.

THE FIRST LAW OF THE DISTRIBUTION OF
TEMPORAL GOODS AND EVILS:
THEY ALL SERVE THE PERFECTION OF
THE CHURCH OF JESUS CHRIST

God, in his plan, permitted our downfall so that he could draw from it a virtue and happiness that we could enjoy and was greater than the first. This virtue is the virtue of Christ, which is a love that binds the sinful creature with the God who has been provoked.

This virtue and consequent happiness had to be brought down to earth and, on earth, had to triumph over everything. This could not happen unless supreme Providence gave perpetual existence to the society of human beings who possessed this virtue. But the society of human beings needs external goods in order to live on earth. Therefore, external goods had to be assured for it. Furthermore, it had to triumph and increase, cultivating this particular virtue. Finally, it had to call to itself every human being; all temporal goods had to serve it and draw all things to it. This is precisely the history of the Church of JESUS Christ and is the first law. According to this law God distributed and ordered all temporal goods at the beginning. In his sublime mind, he did not assign them to particular

individuals who were just, but to the whole society of his just. Nor did he assign all goods in an instant but through the course of ages, and not as a reward for his just but as a means of their subsistence, multiplication and triumph over human greed.

The first law therefore according to which God distributed goods and evils is: EVERYTHING SHALL SERVE THE PRESERVATION, INCREASE AND SANCTIFICATION OF THE CHURCH.

16.

THOSE WHO OPPOSE GOD'S JUST PEOPLE CAN START PROSPERING BUT NOT END PROSPEROUSLY

A look at history shows that all earthly kingdoms rise, flourish and collapse. In their midst, we see God's Church in its humility always the same, outliving all mortal kingships. From its very first appearance in the most despised and contemptible nation, and guided by a few poor fishermen, who were disciples of a condemned man, it declared that it must fill the earth. But nobody ridiculed its great promises; everyone took them seriously. Princes mobilised, and those who ruled the whole earth applied their great power to annihilate the Church. The struggle (or more accurately, the butchery) lasted three centuries, and in every region innocent blood was spilt. But when the struggle ended, we see who the victors were. The emperors, finally exhausted by the massacre of just people who offered no defence but allowed themselves to be torn apart like lambs by wolves, were punished one by one, the majority of them struck down by God's anger.

The Church won a victory in its mission every time it was laid low. Bearing these trophies, she continued to make progress, even to reaching the royal palace where she received the Emperor of the universe as a son; in her mercy, she embraced the descendant of tyrants. They were able to begin but not finish.

The harsh tests however did not cease, because they must never cease, yet the outcome of all her diverse battles is the same as the first. It does not matter whether she is attacked by cruel power or by the sophisms and cunning of a dominant philosophy, or by the pernicious evil of heretics, or the barbarisms of the times, or by the immoral behaviour of her own children, or the hypocrisy of her intractable ministers, or indeed by all these things put together. She is certainly afflicted and distressed, and concerned more for her children than for herself. All her enemies always proclaim triumph in the face of her groaning, and boast their victory throughout the world.

Nevertheless, the suffering Church still lives, still resists with her faith, meekness, unconquered patience and prayers; she still offers her blood.

But this beautiful spouse of Christ need not weep: a calm look around shows that her enemies no longer exist, they have passed like shadows of the night, they are under the earth; their memory has gone or is abhorred. But the Church exists and lives, and the universe applauds her triumph.

This observation of history supposes that from the beginning God had so disposed human goods that his Church did not lack anything it needed.

17.

THE VIRTUE OF THE JUST SHALL CONQUER MORE
COMPLETELY THROUGH THEIR TEMPORAL
OPPRESSION

I have said that human beings, left to themselves, dispute and compete among themselves for possession of human goods, which are divided according to the strength and valour of the combatants. This is *natural law* corresponding to natural virtue, and goods are divided according to it.

But a new kind of virtue, supernatural virtue, was brought into the world by Jesus Christ. This virtue was directed to our acquisition of an eternal, not a temporal good, provided we did not entrust and abandon ourselves to nature's force but solely to the power of grace. A new law therefore entered the world to direct the division of temporal goods and evils. It stated that contempt for temporal goods, or better, total lack of trust in them, resulted in possession of these very goods.

We should not be surprised therefore if Christian

nations always stand out, even in human greatness, among the other nations of the world simply because they have greater contempt for human goods.

The Church, totally humble and poor in its spirit, will be continually enriched. The priesthood will become richer in the measure that its ministers sincerely love poverty and are outstanding with their generosity in the holy use of their riches. This is the amazing but inevitable course followed by things: poverty was chosen as an educator and teacher of Christians. It is, I would say, their first virtue; they are strongly enjoined not to be solicitous about anything. Only God thinks of them; indeed, God had thought of them from the beginning of all things.

Their superior wisdom enthusiastically embraces God's plans, to which their wisdom tranquilly abandons itself, expecting everything from God, because it desires his, not human, triumph. It is this complete and humble poverty of spirit that must prepare and grant to Christians those goods for which they have no affection whatsoever. But the society of Christians, after teaching the world detachment from these goods by the example of its faithful people leading a poor and hard life, is also charged with teaching the world how to use the goods well.

It must therefore practise and demonstrate successively in itself all the virtues involved in the administration of human things.

While directing all things externally, it must keep its spirit at a distance from them, as it did when it first

received them. The Christian society, made rich and powerful by God, not by human beings, and putting its trust in him alone, must in the course of the centuries witness to what its divine author said: *OMNIA TRAHAM AD ME IPSUM*, I will draw all things to myself, I will draw them to the nakedness of the cross.

Because Christian virtue is distinguished by detachment from natural things, produces victory over them and guides our external possession of them, Christians continually rejoice in their hearts over external sufferings; through these sufferings they intimately feel their immense superiority over all the forces of nature, and hence regard suffering as a happy event, not simply for their salvation, but also for the salvation of their fellow humans.

If some of them, justified in Christ, suffer more than their faults require, they are compensated by God; they have a kind of excess credit with God and, after being redeemed, this excess makes them redeemers of others. They also participate in everything possessed by the author of grace, even in the work of redemption. Hence there must be great joy in the awareness of this sublime participation, a joy that at every instant returns upon itself, as it were, and in this continual return, incessantly renews and multiplies itself. It is true that it is hidden from the world, but it is all the more precious for that. The profane should keep their distance: it is the ineffable secret of the saints!

18.

SECOND LAW OF THE DISTRIBUTION OF
TEMPORAL
GOODS AND EVILS: THE DISTRIBUTION TENDS TO
PREPARE THE PEOPLE FOR THE GOSPEL

But society, as the custodian on earth of perfect virtue, could not subsist in an uninterrupted succession until the end, unless God, at the beginning of things when he determined the distribution of goods, took into account the weakness and infirmity of the nature in which he was resolved to insert his grace. He did not need to destroy the elements of that nature, but simply perfect it. This had to be done sweetly, through those laws of his grace I discussed above. These laws manifest in the redemption of souls the same wisdom as in the creation of the material universe, which proceeds harmoniously and is preserved

through uniform and regular operations.

Divine grace, in its distribution, definitely follows certain laws enacted by God, laws that for the most part are hidden from us. Man had to be directed to that total supernatural virtue that lies in the victory of the spirit over the whole of rebellious nature. This could happen only by degrees, in keeping with the development of human nature into which grace is inserted, a development brought about mostly through the action of temporal goods and evils on us.

For the execution of this second law God made another three admirable decrees, the first of which is: 'True believers shall enjoy prosperity of family or nation when, through lack of intellectual development, they cannot sufficiently conceive a happiness totally separate from sensible things and, if necessary, will be helped by miracles, so that they may be assured that there is a god who rewards virtue.'

This decree fulfils two purposes: 1. the preservation and uninterrupted continuity throughout time of the society of the just, and 2. the help given to the weakness and imperfection of any just individuals.

In the case of the society of the just, this decree was in force up to the time of Jesus Christ, who purified this society with his blood and made it totally spiritual. After Jesus Christ, it is applied only in keeping with the good pleasure of divine mercy, for the sake of just individuals who need it.

At the start, man could not abstract from sensible things, or think solely of spiritual things. The individual, it seems, was bound to the family, and when nations began, we see a particular unity in them, very similar to family unity.

All this explains God's infinite goodness. Knowing fully the human nature he had created, he did not force us from the beginning to carry out the most difficult operation of abstracting perfectly from human goods, particularly from fatherhood and nationality. Indeed, a sudden movement like this was contrary to the laws of our mixed nature.

Thus the Lord very early on identified the cult of himself with the vicissitudes of a family, thus making the cult *familial*. This form of religion was maintained in the house of the Patriarchs until the descendants of that house were mature.

God next made his cult *national*, that is, he identified it admirably with all the interests and vicissitudes of the chosen nation.

But when human beings were eventually able to separate not only the interests of the family from the interests of the nation, but the interests of the nation from those of humanity and religion, the human race was perfect. It was now the fullness of time. JESUS Christ appeared on earth and proclaimed a religion separated and abstracted from all earthly interests, both small and great, and from everything to do with corporeal nature. This religion therefore rules over itself; it is thus pure from flesh and blood, just as God is pure.

19.

**THE TEMPORAL GOODS AND EVILS MUST
EDUCATE MEN TO SUPERNATURAL VIRTUE**

All people had to be educated by Providence to this religion. To accomplish this end, Providence used caresses and shocks, that is, corporal goods and evils distributed according to his wisdom. In this distribution we note a second decree:

‘The sensible goods given to the human race in its insufficiently developed state as a reward for its faith and obedience shall be directed to strengthening human beings in their submission

of spirit to all that God makes known to them and that they are unable to know. They are therefore disposed to embrace implicitly the pure virtue of the redeemer, and by means of this disposition all sensible goods shall be directed to their salvation.’

God truly regulates temporal goods and evils according to our human weakness and according to our greater or lesser materiality. However, he always directs the goods and evils to teaching us spiritually and leading us to that sublime virtue which is destined to conquer all things. Because we cannot reach the peak of such great virtue all at once, grace is given us by degrees, in the way that nature develops in us by degrees. God does not want us to think that our nature is sufficient; on the contrary he wants us to acknowledge our need of supreme help

This approach to God comes from the faith that raises us up to him; indeed, if God had not spoken to us we would have had no means of attaining him. Hence, *grace* is given according to the degree of faith, and the degree of faith depends on the degree of *revealed truth*, that is, grace depends on revelation. The old grace therefore was basically the wait for the Messiah and the acceptance of everything he would teach, while the new grace opens up into an explicit faith in all he taught and embraces the wait for the fulfilment of his infallible promises.

Such then is the ingenuity of divine goodness. It condescends, so to speak, to help all levels of human nature and all the different states of this nature.

Two conditions were necessary for accomplishing man's salvation after the sin of the first father. First: salvation had to be obtained by means of such a pure virtue of man that this virtue consisted in a total sacrifice of his corrupt substance, and that all earthly goods were offered by him as satisfaction for offended justice. Second: it was necessary that this most pure justice, totally independent of anything on earth, totally spiritual and totally alone, formed the sole end of man's acts and that he was in fact able to make this justice the aim of his actions, the ultimate term of his desires.

God found a way to save everyone in whatever state they might be and at all times, and always by humbling all human nature; in other words, he found a way to satisfy the above-mentioned conditions of human salvation. When humanity was finally able to abstract pure virtue, God saved it by teaching it to sacrifice its nature to him, as in fact the disciples of the Crucified do. But at the time when humanity was still incapable of using its intelligence to raise itself to such heights, God saved it by giving it a docile spirit ready to do all that he might say and command. Hence, without fully understanding the matter, humanity was now disposed to the mystic sacrifice, horrendous to nature, which the divine exemplar had to consummate on the cross in the sight of all. This was the state of those ancient, just people who languished in the expectation and desire of the Redeemer.

20.

**AFFLICTIONS PROVE AND PURIFY
THE DISCIPLES OF CHRIST**

Finally, divine wisdom made a third decree or the execution of the second law, which is:

‘Man, in his insufficiently developed state, shall be mentally helped to separate natural goods from supernatural goods by means of tribulations

apportioned in keeping with his capacity and with grace.’

According to the words of Scripture, God uses afflictions to test, prove and purify his saints. They see and bless God’s just intervention in the world and also see their virtue accompanied by temporal calamities. Hence, applying their ever-present faith, they conclude that beyond this world there must be a far more excellent happiness in the divine treasures with which the Almighty rewards virtue, and the Almighty fully guarantees this with his word.

Consequently, the idea of true happiness is purified ever more in their minds. While they experience the fragility of human, natural things, God gives them a taste of the spiritual consolations with which their hearts are filled and which makes them aware of their happiness, of their strength and of the heavenly balm that the consoler-spirit diffuses in their souls. They therefore dedicate themselves sincerely to detaching themselves from all mortal things, gradually caring nothing for them and finally despising them. In this way they embrace their Saviour’s naked cross as a unique and priceless treasure.

BOOK THREE

THE LAW OF THE LEAST MEANS APPLIED TO THE GOVERNMENT OF DIVINE PROVIDENCE

1.

THE END OF PROVIDENCE IN THE GOVERNMENT OF THE WORLD

The ultimate end of Providence in the government of the world consists in the *greatest moral perfection of intelligent creatures*, from which follows *the greatest eudaemonological good*, that is, the greatest happiness, because intelligent and moral beings can have no other end than to be intelligent and moral and possess the good these confer. This good is the absolute and final end; all other ends are relative and partial and relative to the final end they are but means.

It is then a question of establishing the extent of the moral perfection and happiness that God Almighty should communicate to his creatures so they should acquire the greatest good.

The quantum of moral and eudaemonological good could not be infinite because the creature cannot be infinite, but even being a finite quantity, in the absence of any other problems it could grow indefinitely according to God's will.

Indeed, one cannot imagine that the divine goodness, being of its nature infinite, could close off its benefit at a certain measure, unless wisdom sets limits. In that case, this limitation does not diminish but rather perfects and fulfils goodness. And it also diminishes the absolute quantity of the external effect by affording a greater relative quantity because the effect is maximum in relation to the means.

2.

**THE LAW OF PROVIDENCE
IN THE GOVERNMENT OF THE WORLD**

Providence obtains the ends it has proposed to itself concerning the government of the world by

the least means, that is, the inviolable law of wisdom and goodness.

The problem that divine wisdom had to confront to trace the operative pathway for divine goodness was this: 'to determine the quantity of moral eudaemonological good that the Creator should share with his creatures so that this amount should be maximum relative to the means employed'. For where the result might be maximum and the quantity of means the least, the state of the universe would be perfect. An infinite goodness could not have made anything more ordered.

It follows that in such a universe, having such a perfect order conceived by the divine mind, there will be sins and damage of those who either have sinned or still cause damage; it must be patent that far from prejudicing the total good of the Creator, they will constitute the confirmation of it.

Nothing shows that is impossible. And if the thing is not impossible, we must suppose that the Supreme Being has operated thus. Otherwise it would be necessary to prove that God does not exist or to admit that he has not worked in a way in agreement with his divine attributes.

The two propositions are equally absurd. The conclusion, then, is that God exists, as shown by other proofs, and that the said evils are permitted by him as links in a very ordered universe.

3.

THE REGULATORY PRINCIPLE OF WISDOM IN
ITS RELATIONSHIP TO THE CREATION AND
GOVERNMENT OF THE WORLD

Evils are found in this our universe because the law of least means has so ordained it, that the outcome might be perfect and totally worthy of God.

To demonstrate this we are required to find a principle that can guide us in applying the law of the least means to the universe. It must be the same principle that divine wisdom had to use to solve the great problem and thus mark out the right path for divine goodness to follow.

The principle, which results from what has been said and is clearly indicated in the Gospel, can be expressed as follows: 'The principle of the least means will be maintained when created entia are so governed that the greatest possible good can be drawn from their activities.' The principle of the least action clearly requires that all created entia and all their activities are used in such a way that their use and, so to speak, their mutual trading, give the greatest return.

Jesus Christ seems to have indicated that the providence of the heavenly Father harmonised with this principle when he said that the Father's glory consisted in drawing the maximum fruit from his disciples: 'My Father is the vinedresser. Every branch of mine that bears no fruit he takes away, and every branch that does bear fruit he prunes that it may bear more fruit,' and he gives the reason: 'By this my Father is glorified that you bear MAXIMUM fruit' (John 15: 1,2,8). These words expressly say that God's providence tends to produce a *maximum* good, that is, the maximum fruit possible that can be drawn from his vine.

This great principle can be translated into another formula: 'The principle of the least means will be maintained when created entia are so governed that not one of them and nothing of their activity are left unused, that is, are lost or do not bear the fruit they could if used in another way.' This also seems to be expressed in divine Scripture in Job's words: 'Nothing upon earth is done without a cause'; that is, without an end intended by Providence, as the context seems to indicate. Christ himself also taught that no sparrow falls to the earth independently of the heavenly Father's will (Matt. 10: 29) meaning that no event, no matter how small in the world, is wasted but is directed by God's wisdom to obtaining some good.

4.

WHEN IS IT FITTING FOR THE DIVINE POWER TO

INTERVENE EXTRAORDINARILY AND DIRECTLY?

The undeniable and evident principle enables us to apply to the government of the world the law of the least means, and to draw as corollaries some propositions which demonstrate that the eudaemonological moral evils permitted by God are part of the plan of an infinite goodness and wisdom. We begin to see this from a proposition that originates directly from the principle of application: 'God would not be acting wisely if, instead of drawing a certain quantity of good from created entities and activities, he were to obtain it by a direct and extraordinary intervention of his power'.

The reason is obvious: in such a case the entities and activities that he left unproductive would remain unprofitable, unused and lost because he disposed that the fruit they could produce be obtained by the use of another means, by a different use of his own activity, not by the activity of his creatures. Hence, one cause would be used as two causes to obtain an effect as one effect, whereas the extra cause and action that would be used in this way and granted the wish to use them, could obtain another fruit different from that obtainable from the created activity.

For example, let us say that divine wisdom, by using creatures and exploiting their activities to produce good, could obtain a quantity of eudaemonological and moral good equal to a hundred, after all the evils mixed with the good had been subtracted. Instead however of doing this, let us suppose that divine wisdom wanted to obtain

the same amount of good by miracles and by any other extraordinary intervention of its power. God's infinite goodness would still not be satisfied because, in the second case, a complex of means was employed which, used in a different way, could have produced an amount of goods equal to two hundred and more. Therefore, a loss of a good equal to one hundred and more has taken place.

Hence it is not valid to say that the good obtained by the action of natural entia is mixed with evils that could have been avoided by a direct, extraordinary intervention of God. In fact, in the weighing scales of the universal Governor of the world, evils and goods must neutralize each other, as they do in human affections, and that the total of goods is obtained by first subtracting the evils, so that only a total of pure good is left.

Granted therefore that in the case of created entities and activities, the greatest amount of good cannot be obtained without the admixture of evils (which is a limitation proper to all contingent beings), it does not follow that divine power must intervene to remove and prevent the evils. Such an intervention would entail a loss of so much good that we would have the absurdity of a great means being used to obtain a little end.

If it is in fact certain that: 1, the extraction of all the good possible from created activities cannot be done without simultaneously permitting evils; that 2. These evils cannot be removed without the extraordinary intervention of divine power; and that 3. This extraordinary intervention is contrary to the

law of wisdom, which is the law of the least means, then the eudaemonological-moral evils to which creatures are subject, the sins, and the damnation of some, do not destroy but rather establish the wisdom and goodness of God.

5.

THE NECESSITY OF SECOND CAUSES

The principle we have discussed gives rise to another corollary: the necessity of second causes.

The purpose of divine wisdom and goodness is to obtain a maximum fruit from creatures, but creatures could not produce any fruit if they were not causes.

We should carefully note this truth: if creatures were not causes, creation would lack a purpose worthy of God. When God created, he could have no other purpose than to make his creatures good, just as he is good. If creatures were solely passive, they would not be good with a goodness of their own because they would receive everything: to receive is not goodness, much less moral goodness. Only those natures that desire, love and do moral good are capable of their own goodness and of moral goodness. Hence, with their own acts they make themselves causes of good.

Not only divine wisdom, but divine power shines more powerfully when it produces cause-beings rather than beings lacking action. A power that is not complete and perfect cannot produce other causes that are perfectible by their own acts; an ens that is totally inert and impotent to do anything does not attain the order of perfection. Producing only one cause is much more powerful than directly producing many effects.

Therefore not only divine goodness, not only wisdom, but the very display of power required that God create beings that were second causes.

If the universe had to be composed of causes, God had to make these causes fruitful, that is, produce in their overall complex all the good they could. This is the principle of application of the law of the least means, which I wanted to establish.

Once again therefore, it was necessary that the natural order and the subordination of second causes be maintained as much as possible without interruption throughout the course of the world.

Moreover, because entia are constant natures, they are also constant causes, and because they are bound harmoniously with each other, they have a permanent order. The result is another very beautiful corollary: 'It conforms to divine wisdom that the universe be ruled by universal, permanent laws and not through individual, arbitrary actions'.

6.

THE IMMEDIATE AND SUPERNATURAL INTERVENTION OF DIVINE POWER

The second corollary resulting from the principle of application is: 'the direct, supernatural intervention of divine power in creatures is certainly not impossible, but it cannot take place except to obtain those goods that the creatures could not produce by themselves, no matter how they are governed, but can produce when helped by God'.

This intervention takes place in fact when *grace* is communicated to the creature, which raises the creature to a supernatural order. No human being, no moral-intellective creature could ever have attained the *perception of God* with the forces of its nature alone, nor communicate directly with God, if God had not communicated himself to it; in a word, it could never have performed one single act pertaining to the supernatural order and, much less, enter habitually into this order.

The communication of divine grace is like a new creation: through it a new entity, a new ability is created in us.

God gratuitously endows his creature with this gift

that is outside nature, and it is a gift very fitting to his goodness because his goodness, which is infinite, tends to produce every possible good. In this gift God upholds the law of wisdom, which is the law of the least means, that is, he gives his grace in such quantity and in such a distribution that, joined to the activities proper to human nature, it can produce the greatest fruit.

Consequently: no quantity of grace is lost, none is given fruitlessly by God; it produces the good that he intended when he gave it. We find that God himself says this in Isaiah: 'His word will not return to him empty'. (Is. 55: 10-11).

In bestowing grace, God calculates the dispositions of his creatures and foresees the use they will make of it. He also foresees all the consequences that will come from it not only to the individual to whom it is given but to all other individuals as well, to the whole human race and to all intelligent creatures. He bestows grace at the time and to the extent he foresees that that particular quantity, united to the natural and supernatural activities of the creature, will produce fruit greater than could have been obtained by any other distribution.

This shows how God had good reason for wishing to obtain the sanctification of *many* by means of a *few* of his saints, the chosen ministers of his mercies. St. Thomas uses the same reason to show how fitting it was for the Word to assume only one suppositum of human nature, not all supposita: 'The short path,' he says, 'followed by wise people in

their operation means they do not use many means to obtain what one means will obtain. Hence, it was most fitting that through one man only all other human beings should be saved'.

In the bestowal and distribution of his grace, God follows the same law of wisdom that he follows in the bestowal and distribution of the gifts of nature, in his creation, preservation and government of entia

Clearly then, the law of divine wisdom is one single law without exceptions of any kind. Its applications however vary greatly, according to the many circumstances that one infinite mind can simultaneously embrace. Not a single circumstance, not even the least, escapes this mind, which can completely and most exactly explain the reasons for them all.

Thus, from the law of least means follow other secondary laws that are derivations and applications of it.

7.

THE LAW OF EXCLUDED SUPERFLUITY

A third consequence of the same principle of application is: Because God draws the greatest possible good from everything he does in the universe, 'the law of excluded superfluity' must apply in what he does.

It was fitting therefore that divine wisdom prevent all these effects of natural, prolific causes; they could be overabundant and left unused relative to the sum of total good. For this reason, when created entia are posited together in a most wise way, they limit each other in their propagation and action. The excessive luxuriance of plants is tempered by different levels of soil sterility and by other causes limiting vegetation. The excessive multiplication of an individual species is moderated by the proximity of plants to one another and their struggle for nutritious soil. Their exuberant fecundity is further limited by animals, for which they serve as food. Animals themselves are exposed to the action of a great number of natural agents that impede the propagation of each

species beyond a certain limit.

This kind of struggle, seen in all nature, is a means used by the most provident Author of the universe to remove the excessive effects and superfluous actions of created causes that would prejudice the total good. He places, and considers, entia and their actions in admirable proportion and wonderful harmony,

Even human death is regulated by supreme goodness according to this law, and serves the great end of removing what is superfluous or unused from the universe. The same truth was taught by Jesus Christ: he used a parable to show that the good are called to a reward only when their fruit is complete, and have been left on earth to produce that fruit. 'The kingdom of God is as if a man should scatter seed upon the ground, and should sleep and rise night and day, and the seed should sprout and grow, he knows not how. The earth produces of itself, first the blade, then the ear, then the full grain in the ear. But when the grain is ripe, at once he puts in the sickle, because the harvest has come' (Mark 4: 26-29). Here we should note the words 'at once' (*STATIM MITTIT FALCEM* [at once he puts in the sickle]). They express exactly how God never leaves the elect on earth for one instant longer than the time necessary for the abundance of fruit they must give. The same law determines the hour of death of the reprobate, that is, of all those God foresees will no longer bear the fruit they should, either directly or by their emendation or indirectly by occasioning sanctity in others and, more generally by occasioning a

greater amount of total good. 'Every tree', Christ says, that does not bear fruit is cut down' (Matt. 7: 19).

It will help if I use an impressive example to explain the nature of the time when the most wise Lord looks for fruit from his plants and if he finds none, consigns them to the fire. The example is the Flood, and the plant that had to bear fruit was the human race — the allegory is equally valid for an individual, for society and for the whole of humanity.

The human race had become depraved by disordered pleasures of sense. Because God is essential goodness, he wanted to restore it, but because he is also essential wisdom, he wanted to use the least means to restore it. He had two possibilities open to him: correct the depraved human race by threats, warnings, exhortations and other means of his providence, or destroy it while saving some incorrupt root from which it would retake, regrow and become a new plant. Wisdom found this second means much simpler and more readily applicable than the first. It therefore chose it for its purpose: it submerged all flesh in the waters, saving one good family as the stock for all the new generations. Even today, with our weak understanding, we can comprehend how God had to calculate that this arrangement would allow the world to be repopulated in a few centuries with a new, incorrupt people, as at the beginning. If he had not taken this measure, a great number of centuries would have had to pass before the generations born and raised from the corrupt stock

were cured of the universal disorder and made good: the depravity and scandals would have passed down from father to son, from age to age, with the possibility of increasing rather than diminishing

When God wishes to eliminate an individual, a family, an unproductive nation, from the earth, he does not do so with a miracle — this would be contrary to the law of the least means. Instead, he arranges the series of second causes in such a way that they produce the willed effect. To obtain this effect therefore he needed to give a particular order to the chain of second causes, all of which he saw with a totally simple act of his mind and which cannot be changed without alteration to the total, very complex fabric of creation. Hence, eternal wisdom had also to calculate whether the order given to the second causes harmonised appropriately with the intention of obtaining the maximum good. Creation, which is precisely the complex of second causes, is so limited that sometimes a partial good effect cannot be obtained without the loss of a greater effect, or an evil eliminated without opening the way to a greater evil.

8.

THE LAW OF THE PERMISSION OF EVIL

The same law gives us the reason why and according to which God permits evil. The reader should recall what evil is. I have called it a privation of good. Because good is the entity of things, the more entity there is, the more good there is; and there is more *entity* where there is more *action*.

It follows that the permission of evil comes directly from the law of the least means. This law requires God not to intervene in nature as creator, preserver and sanctifier except only with that quantity of action that produces the greatest possible good in whatever way the quantity is used. On many

occasions God will not intervene; on many occasions he will cease to act or produce second causes or their capabilities or perfections because, if he did act, the activity used or produced would not bring forth the greatest fruit, which alone satisfies his infinite goodness.

This abstention of God from operating is the permission of evil. God is the *first cause*, and all effects, including those of *second causes*, go back to this first cause. Hence, if the first cause ceases in some measure to co-operate, many effects of the second causes also cease. This absence of effects or of their fullness and perfection is not therefore operated by God. Whenever God operates, he produces a good, but whenever he abstains from operating, the absence of effects comes of itself. The first cause is certainly the universal cause of all things, but just as it does not remove the free will of intellectual creatures when they do good, so the absence of its action does not remove their free will when they fail in their operation and thus do evil.

Consequently:

1. If a created, free cause does evil, it is imputable to that cause. The imputation is the relationship of the action solely with the free, direct cause that produced it, not with the first cause.
2. The sinful, created, free cause could have avoided the evil, could have chosen good; otherwise it would not be free.
3. The first cause produced this free cause that chose evil, and produced it such that it could have equally chosen good or evil. If this were not so, the first cause would not have produced it free.

4. This free cause, in choosing evil, fell short of the fullness and perfection of its act, but it could have avoided falling short.
5. The first cause continued to produce the free cause in the very act in which the free cause fell short of the fullness and perfection of its act, even though it could have avoided falling short, that is, the first cause made the free cause able not to fail, but did not produce the failure of its act. This failure, as something privative, cannot be produced by a cause that is total activity, that never fails and has an infallible operation
6. The *permission* that God gives for moral evil is not itself the cause of evil. The cause of evil is a *deficient cause*, but in God there is no deficiency; his every act is perfect. This perfect act of God however, precisely because perfect, having maximum good as its object, does not extend to producing all the perfect acts that second causes can do. As a result, deficient causes can posit some imperfect, deficient acts, not because they could not have done otherwise but have done so through their free choice.
7. God's permission of evil does not deprive the free cause of its ability to avoid evil; it simply does not prevent the free cause from committing evil. The object of the permission is not *antecedent* in time to the evil committed, as if the evil were necessary because of a powerful impulse to evil, or because the ability to avoid it has been taken away. The object is *contemporaneous* with the evil, it is the actual evil itself. Hence, the evil is not *caused* by either *positive* or *negative* permission but is *simply permitted*.

Whether God operates as *positive cause* or intervenes as *negative cause*, it is always the law of wisdom that directs him, always the law of the least means that determines his operation. He carries out nothing except that from which he can draw the greatest fruit, and abstains from producing anything that does not give him this fruit. For the same reason he does not impede but permits the evil of fault, or allows penal evil by not producing the activities and their order that would prevent penal evil; if he produced those activities or their order, his action would be badly applied because it would not bear the greatest fruit, and he does not act if his actions do not bear the greatest fruit. He always weighs out not only the goods that his action would give but those that it would impede and those that it would bring with it.

9.

THE LAW OF HARMONY

Many particular reasons can demonstrate that when God wished to create many entia, it was fitting that he put them in relationship and communication with each other, so that linked in various ways they should form one whole. But all these reasons can be reduced to the law of the least means, or at least this great law certainly requires the connection and unity of created things.

One thing needs another in order to subsist and develop. Human beings need food provided by brute animals and vegetables; we need air to

breathe, light to see, and we need those like ourselves in order to multiply and form societies, etc. All the other animals also need entities different from themselves to maintain their existence and perpetuate their species.

We can say that no living thing can stand on its own, and the whole universe concurs in making it exist, endure and act for its ends. It is true of course that if God had wished to separate one entity from another, he could have preserved it by miracles of his omnipotence, but if he had done this, the capacities that entities have to help and sustain each other would have been left unused; there would have been an immense and useless expenditure of activity. But according to the law of the least means no entity or activity must remain fruitless; rather each must produce all the good it can. Hence the intelligence outside the world disposes and locates it in the place, time and manner most appropriate to the end.

The only way we know that the cause of the universe is wise is by contemplating the traces of wisdom present in the universe. These traces are visible in the harmonious connection of many entities helping one other and forming one whole, ordered to one end. Hence, the universe is as it were the book in which we apprehend the knowledge that makes us capable of virtue

If we had no connection with other creatures and there was no continuous exchange of action and passion between them and us, we could not make ourselves virtuous by using the least means. Just as the knowledge we have comes from this

universe in which we are, so we are given the occasion for practising virtue and, by our own efforts, acquiring moral perfection to which all the good we are capable of reduces. Eudaemonological good acquires the concept of true human good only if it is an extension of and a very appropriate sequel to moral good. If several individuals had not dwelt together, the human species would not have multiplied, and there would have been no social virtues, which are strictly speaking human virtues. The use of the entia of the universe and of the goods and evils they produce is the material in which are embodied, as it were, all those moral virtues that philosophers describe: justice, fortitude, prudence, temperance.

Moreover, all human affections, which is where the great part of our happiness lies, and all the countless pleasures put before us by the wonderful variety of many creatures adapted to satisfy our natural tendencies, would also be impossible. One of the greatest pleasures of human understanding is the contemplation of the harmonious Whole which, through creative wisdom, is the result of the interweaving of so many various and contrary things. Equally, one of the greatest delights of the heart is the delight that comes to individuals from the society of their fellows, living in each other through the action of love. Furthermore, through the effect of supernatural charity one person lives and takes pleasure in all those who share in the same charity. Thus, in each one, life is ceaselessly multiplied, increased and accumulated.

10.

THE LAW OF CONTINUITY OR GRADATION

When God wished to create contingent beings, he could create only a finite quantity, not because he lacked the power, but because if he did otherwise, he would contradict the limitation inherent in these entia and in the nature of numbers.

What kind and quantity of entity therefore did God propose to create, and in fact created?

Those known to us are three: *material elements; sensitive principles; and intellective principles.*

We saw that the law of the least means requires God to draw from these three kinds all the good they can give. But for this to happen God must not allow the loss of any of the forces, capacities, passions and modifications that can give some good. Therefore, in the previous chapter, I concluded that it was fitting for God not to leave entia isolated and separate from each other but to unite them into one whole, putting them in contact with each other so that through their mutual interaction and modification they would exercise all their capacities and faculties, and none would be left unused. The result would be that they each could contribute something to the sum of good.

Using a similar argument here, we can arrive at another conclusion, equally evident: it was fitting that God use these three elementary kinds to form all the entia that could be formed from them, uniting them in all possible ways, precisely because each of their different combinations is a new entity from which supreme wisdom could draw some good. But this would not be true if a particular combination within the universal order could not increase the sum of good.

Thus, if we suppose that the three kinds of elements had to be composed and intermingled in all possible ways so that no capacity and aptitude was lost, the result must clearly be the law of continuity between them, that is, the universe had to embrace a *continuous gradation* of entia from the simplest to the most complex, from the lowest

to the highest, according to the quantity that infinite wisdom could form from the three elements.

This law does not prevent the three elements having a nature that remains inconfusably distinct. Their nature is immutable, as each element corresponds to a different idea, which is the foundation of a different species. If the atom, which is matter, could change into a sensitive principle, it would cease to be. Similarly, if the sensitive principle, in so far as sensitive, changed into an intellectual principle, it would no longer be a sensitive principle.

The law of gradation or continuity therefore results from the principle that it is fitting that God should draw from the three component elements of creation all the good they could give with their various unions, modifications, faculties and acts. This law, visible in the universe, has two parts: I. the *greatest number of species of entia* that intermingle without confusion; II. Within the same species, the *greatest number of grades*, according to the level of participation of individuals in the species.

Composed being, that is, the human being, is necessary by virtue of the law of the least action, which is the law of wisdom. Such a being is necessary as a link in the chain of entia. Through this link God draws all the possible good from the elementary entities: *matter, feeling and intelligence*, and not only from each but from their conjunction and various admixtures.

11.

THE LAW OF VARIETY

Divine wisdom, which cannot by its very nature decree any deviation from the law of the least means, must draw the greatest profit from creation. From this law is derived, by necessity, the law of variety in the actuations and modifications of entia.

This law is: the entia that make up the universe and are mixed and grouped together in all possible ways must undergo all the modifications they are capable of and perform all the diverse acts for which they have the faculties, in so far as divine wisdom can draw from each a good that increases the overall total good. Thus, if there were only one possible modification of a created ens, only one capacity, only one act that could produce for divine wisdom the fruit of a very small good to be added to the sum total, and if God neglected to squeeze out, as it were, that drop of net good from his creature, he would be deviating from the path prescribed by his infinite wisdom, because the modification, activity or act would remain unused and would be lost.

From all the variety of modifications and acts therefore, divine wisdom can draw some good that increases the total good. Consequently all possible varieties in created entia must be present, unless there are some that cannot be harmonized with the order of the universe and with the maximum good desired of them

Every *essence* therefore of created things must be realized and represented in the universe, clothed with all the possible varieties of accidents from which some good can be obtained. A created ens must be found in all possible states from the lowest state to the highest, in all acts from the most imperfect to the most perfect, in all its relationships with other entia that differ specifically from it.

Consequently, every created nature, because of the *limitation* necessarily inherent in it, is susceptible of a certain number of imperfect states, of a certain number of acts that lack their term (evil consists in this lack). But if divine wisdom can draw some good from these states and evil acts, they also must have a place in the universe. Moreover, it is certain that there is not a single evil in the universe from which an infinite wisdom does not draw some goods.

Indeed, numerous physical evils give us the occasion to exercise virtue, even heroic virtue, as I have said. The moral evils of some people also certainly offer a great and continuous occasion to others to exercise patience, charity, zeal for the glory of God and the salvation of the wicked. In fact, human nature is made in such a way that a contrary produces a contrary. Those who are well disposed would not know the beauty of virtue if they were not starkly confronted with the deformity of vice, to the point of finding it abhorrent.

Hence, if the wicked were eliminated from the earth, an immense quantity of virtuous works would also be eliminated at the same time; even the number of the just would diminish, due to the lack of an effective stimulation to the practice of a more sublime virtue, as Christ taught in the parable of the darnel and wheat.

Furthermore, many wicked people are converted and saved. I said that the moral act of the human spirit that moves towards virtue becomes greater, the more it moves from a greater depth of sin. Hence, in this respect there is no greater good than

the conversion of a sinner, over which ‘the angels rightly rejoice more than over ninety-nine just’ (Luke 15: 7). Even though others are pardoned, they are still necessary for the perfection of the universe, for the great end God has proposed, which is to draw from human nature all the good it can give. We cannot deny that God can draw good even from the damned; he can draw a great abundance, using means of which we are totally ignorant.

Once again therefore I conclude with the two great authorities of Aquinas and St. Augustine. The first, agreeing with the second, says: ‘If all evils were prevented, many goods would be missing from the universe. The lion would not have life if there were no killing of animals, nor would there be the patience of the martyrs, if there were no persecution by tyrants. Hence, St. Augustine says in the *Enchiridion* that Almighty God would not permit the existence of any evil in his works if he were not so omnipotent and good that he can make good even out of evil’ (St Thomas I, q.22, art 2, ad 2.).

12

THE LAW OF EXCLUDED EQUALITY

This law of excluded equality lays down that in the whole of creation there cannot be two intellectual individuals of the same species who in their *final*

state are perfectly equal in all their accidents and relationships. The multiplicity of equal individuals of this kind is excluded through metaphysical necessity, because it removes the element that is the principle of individuality and multiplicity: the element is a different *reality*.

It is true that an ens produced equal to another would be a good for itself but it would be as nothing to the understanding and will of its author; it would be a superfluity to the realisation of the ideal world because it would not add any good to this world which it might not already have. Hence, the being that operates essentially through intelligence and will (like divine being) will never produce such an ens, not because the being does not have the power to produce it, by willing it, but because it does not will it. Producing it contradicts the law that guides wisdom in its *end*, which is 'to realise all the good that is in intelligible essence'. It also contradicts the law that guides wisdom in the *mode* of its operation, which is 'to use the least means for the end', a law that excludes all superfluities.

If instead of Adam God had created a human being equal to Adam, differing solely in reality (which is possible to conceive), the moral act for which this being would have been the occasion in other intellectual beings that might have known him, would have been exactly the same: morality would have neither gained nor lost anything. Hence, if we suppose an infinite goodness, it will want to produce all good, but wanting to produce all good means wanting the complete realization of the essences of entia. When this creative goodness has obtained this end, it will cease its activity; it will

no longer have any reason to create new individuals who would add nothing to the perfect realization of their essences and give no occasion for any new act of moral goodness. The love for individuals which completely realizes all the essence of the specific ens to which they belong, is the act which fully esteems and loves that essence; in this way all the moral good possible for them can be expended.

Therefore supreme, creative goodness will never produce two individuals that are perfectly equal and endure in their final *state*. This would be superfluity, because the moral end sought by supreme goodness can be obtained with one single individual.

13.

THE LAW OF UNITY IN THE DIVINE OPERATION

God is *absolute being*. This being has three forms that I call (using a human, inadequate language) reality, ideality and morality. These three forms of being harmonize into a totally simple unity. The mode of operation of absolute being must be the same as itself, that is, one and trine. Operative action pertains to reality but is always directed by ideality. God is inclined to create contingent natures not because he loves their reality as a kind of end, but because in their reality he loves the *ideal essence* that shines in his intellect. Consequently, the Creator's divine affection ultimately terminates in himself.

God must do everything he does with one totally simple act and from eternity because the concept of power at its absolute greatest necessitates this manner of operating. But the same truth applies if we consider what the operation of an infinite intelligence must be. Infinite understanding must know everything with one entirely simple act and know it from eternity. Hence a single, most simple act of God's intelligence embraces from eternity the exemplar of all he wishes to operate, and is the act itself with which he operates.

We have seen that God would not have been able to extract from the universe the greatest good that it could give if everything was not interconnected and all its parts were not bound together. Therefore, I deduced the unity of the universe from the law of the least means. But here I add that this most totally one universe, as it had to be, could not give the greatest good possible (and in this sense be a work appropriate to the supreme craftsman), unless it was first represented in his essence by the

most simple act of divine understanding, and carried out by that very act.

No investigation and choice of any kind whatsoever had to be made by the most excellent and perfect divine will: by means of a totally perfect and totally divine instinct, the divine will went immediately and directly to its object, that is to the *perfect* world which it wished to realize. Thus, it instinctively moved the divine understanding to that totally simple act by which the perfect world was drawn from nothingness without any other determination than the natural perfection of the divine volitive power.

The principle that the Most Wise one has only one object of his operation, the sum of good, and obtains it with a totally simple act, also throws great light on the whole economy of the divine government of the human race. Indeed, if this law prescribes that the whole of good must spring from and be made fruitful by the intelligent creature without any extraordinary, superfluous intervention, then the Most Wise one, who had to fulfil this law, must draw from the very weakness of the creature, from its incredulity and malice, every good that could directly or indirectly be obtained from it.

THE LAW OF HEROISM

‘God, operating in the universe, follows the law of heroism, that is, the law of extremes’.

In fact, this is the difference between the operation of ordinary human beings and that of heroes: the former do not leave the beaten track and keep to mediocrity, heroes, according to their goodness or wickedness, take good and evil to their ultimate. Holy Scripture indicates this characteristic of divine operation. It says that wisdom ‘reaches from end to end mightily and orders all things sweetly’ (Wis. 8: 1). The *might* of divine operation is clearly visible in the infallible attainment of every effect proposed; the *sweetness* is demonstrated in what is done to obtain the desired effect. Second causes themselves are left free to run their course, even when they seem to operate in a contrary way, although in the end despite appearances they all conspire in the Omniscient’s plan.

The law of extremes therefore embraces the *end* and the *means*. If we consider the law relative to the end, that is, to the effect God proposes for himself, it is a consequence of the unity of divine operation. Through this unity, all things are carried out with one eternal act, and the government of the universe is directed to only one preconceived purpose, that is, to obtaining the greatest good that can be drawn from created things. And precisely because this *final good* is the greatest that creatures, directed and helped by God, can give, it is the ultimate extreme attainable.

If we now consider the law of extremes relative to means, the law originates from the laws of continuity and variety. All graduated beings, and all their varieties and acts, are means in the hands of divine wisdom; they are all ordered to its one intention, which is to make evils serve the final sum of good. Evil itself is a means for the excellent intention of wisdom.

Divine wisdom therefore orders and uses for its end all things, from the greatest to the least. Hence Scripture says: 'I fill heaven and earth' (Jer. 23: 23). God, therefore, with his wisdom and his action, touches the extremes of both the natural and supernatural orders. This is a common argument in the canticles of praise in divine Scripture. David exclaims: 'From the rising of the sun to its setting the name of the LORD is to be praised! The Lord is high above all nations, and his glory above the heavens! Who is like the Lord our God, who is seated on high, who looks far down upon the heavens and the earth?' (Ps. 112:3) touching the two extremes of height and depth. . St. Paul, alluding to this, exhorts the Ephesians to obtain the knowledge of these extremes of divine greatness; he prays 'that you may have the power to comprehend, with all the saints, what is the breadth and length and height and depth' (Ephes. 3: 18).

With his power God touches the extremes in the *sphere of real being*, creating all the links in each species from one end of the chain to the other, and developing all their varieties.

God touches the extremes in the *sphere of*

intelligence, establishing total harmony among all the graduated and varied entia (excluding the replicas of the same type), and making them all work towards one purpose.

God touches the extremes in the *sphere of moral being*, and in so doing turns this unique purpose of all entia into the *greatest* possible eudaemonological-moral *good* that they can give. Even though the whole mass of real being is blind, and the whole complex of intelligent beings is free, he makes them all serve *moral being*.

God also makes all the *natural order* serve the *supernatural order*. For this end, he makes the Word come down from his infinite height to become the least of human beings. Later, he makes this last of mortals follow the same path in the opposite direction, rising back up to the right side of the Father: 'He who descended,' St. Paul says, 'is the same one who ascended far above all the heavens, so that he might fill all things' (Ephes. 4: 10).

The glory that comes to God from his touching both extremes with his wisdom and goodness can be appreciated through the wonder experienced by created intelligences. Aware of the immensity of divine operation, they clearly understand the greatness and goodness of its purpose, which is to draw from all things that are, and from all their acts, the greatest universal good these things can give, the greatest increase of the final sum of good.

15.

THE LAW OF ANTAGONISM

The heroism of God's operation stands out more brilliantly when it is opposed, and particularly when opposed in a terrible and incessant battle in which God, as protector of the just and contrary to all appearances, is always the victor. In this battle he uses only the least power necessary to draw the greatest possible good from created things and from the power he has used. This is the law I call the *law of antagonism*.

It is clear that if divine wisdom found it fitting to produce entia in a continuous gradation and have them develop in all their possible varieties, the most terrible struggle between them had to result because they could not but develop in the most contrary directions, even to the extremes of the oppositions they could arrive at. Therefore, the form of evil had to descend through its levels to the lowest degree possible; similarly the form of good had to ascend through its levels to the highest possible point. Moreover, because entia are simply a complex of activities, there had to be a supreme activity for evil and a supreme activity for good, each tending to prevail over the other and increase at the expense and ruin of the other.

Infinite goodness wished to obtain the complete triumph of good by wisely directing things. The good had to consist in such a great quantity of final

good that this final good would have been less if there had not been the opposition of great evil.

Hence, throughout the whole of Scripture we see God described as a champion, a hero who conquers enemies: 'The Lord is as a man of war, Almighty is his name' (Exod. 15: 3). In the Psalms he is called 'Lord God of hosts' (Ps. 79: 5), 'The Lord, the Most High, is terrible, a great king over all the earth' (Ps. 46: 3), and he is continually invoked as such. 'Contend, O Lord, with those who contend with me; fight against those who fight against me! Take hold of shield and buckler and rise for my help' (Ps. 34: 1).

We are each a finite real being that intuits the essence of being, and this essence has no confines. With this intuition we are equipped for knowing every being. But we can either will or not will, love or not love, known being. This faculty makes us moral because moral good consists 'in willing and loving the essence of being, and hence *all being*, without exclusion of any kind.' If the nature of moral good requires us to will and love all being, it also requires us to love every particular being in proportion to the essence of being that it shares in. This proportioned distribution of our esteem and love is the sum of moral duties. We are therefore perfect in proportion to the extent we maintain and love this distribution. But to maintain this just proportion sometimes costs us effort and suffering, which entails struggle and sacrifice.

We are finite but we have the infinite (the essence of being) as the object of morality. Consequently, we have to make an unceasing effort to extend our limitation, opening ourselves to the infinite. This

effort by finite being to make itself equal to the infinite is very demanding indeed, because it entails a kind of disruption of itself, of breaking out in some way of the limits in which created ens is enclosed. If it exceeds them it sees itself as losing its individuality and, as it were, annihilating itself, allowing itself to fall into and be absorbed by the infinite.

On the other hand, virtue and moral good are individual. But because the creature had to have a force capable of repelling organized opposition, a defense of virtue had to be organized; many things and many persons had to unite in favour of virtue.

Therefore, *two societies* on earth, one composed of those whom Scripture calls 'sons of God', the other, of those whom Scripture calls 'sons of men': two cities, the city of God and the city of the devil. As soon as human beings multiplied, these two cities appeared distinct and hostile, and they fight each other onto death until the end of time. They supplied a sublime argument for St. Augustine, who took the name of his immortal work from the name of the better city. This perfection is manifestly greater in proportion to the act and effort we make to acquire it. Hence, without antagonism, supreme moral perfection for us could not have been posited in being. But God's goodness is infinite, and as such tends to draw from the creature ALL the moral good it can give. Thus it was fitting to divine wisdom and goodness to give such an order to created things that in them and through them *maximum antagonism* had to develop as an indispensable means for *their maximum moral perfection*.

A deeper investigation of the intimate nature of this tremendous conflict, this unbounded antagonism between the infinite and the finite, will make us more aware of the greatness of God's goodness.

We have, on the one hand, nature, which is contingent and a limited reality. This limited reality is a limited substantial feeling, which has limited instincts and limited principles of action. These all tend to the limited good which a limited reality is capable of.

On the other hand, there is the unlimited moral law, the essence of being that shines before minds and has no confines; there is an unlimited real being, God. The fact that limited nature tends to its own limited good is not a disorder; on the contrary it is a law of nature. But that it should prefer to esteem and love its limited self as it is and not the unlimited being that is made known to it, this is disorder, injustice, an outrage against the infinite.

This kind of collision between the finite and the infinite was not in itself necessary, because we can easily conceive the possibility of harmony and peace between the finite (as created nature is) and the infinite (which is manifested to created nature). But God wished to act in another way, a way more fitting to his infinite wisdom and goodness. He disposed things in such an order that moral virtue might conquer the greatest temptations, and that the infinite might thus conquer the whole of the finite, and the creator receive maximum glory from creation. To obtain this end it was necessary to permit sin for the following reasons:

1. Without sin the creature could not develop through all its possible states, because the eternal idea contained virtually not only the creature's *limitation* and *deficiency*, but its *fall* with all the degrees of wretchedness through which it descends.

2. In the intelligent creature, sin left a state of malice and disorder, and hence of moral impotency. As a result, the struggle of sinful nature with vice became very difficult, indeed disproportionate, to the point that it could no longer conquer with its own forces. Therefore, the salvation of the creature required God to give extraordinary help. And his direct intervention found a sufficient reason for this because, without his intervention, the creature could no longer give the maximum fruit for which God had drawn the creature out of nothing.

When humanity had fallen, the Word of God had to put himself at the head of the battle that man had lost, and under this captain the victory was no longer in doubt. From the mixture and contests between good and evil there resulted the most marvelous and most complete victory of good over evil and the triumph of God, who is the essential good, and the ultimate perfection of the creature.

16.

THE LAW OF SPEED OF OPERATION

The law of the least means obviously implies and results in a maximum speed of operation and therefore the greatest saving of time but to determine this greatest possible speed of action, the other conditions of the problem must be taken into account. If a part of a machine accelerated its motion more than it should, it would either break down, or the desired effect would not be obtained, or obtained in lesser degree.

The maximum speed of action therefore we are talking about must be a *harmonious* speed, verified in the complex whole and in the co-operation of the movements, and *producing the greatest effect*.

Mankind finds and values this law of the greatest speed and greatest possible saving of time in the most contrary things, for example in the fine arts, in mechanics, political enterprises, moral behaviour, human work and natural processes.

We enjoy the rapidity with which an epic or drama proceeds to its solution, the rapidity with which a story is told or a series of compelling arguments is driven home when well arranged by the speaker. The value of style is in brevity; there is beauty in an

epigram, in a succinct motto, in a witticism. Nearly all sublime replies as well as humorous ones draw their impact from promptness and speed; these are always valued.

Napoleon said that his superiority over others depended solely on his greater speed of thought: others arrived at the same point, but he got there first.

We can honestly say that all great people became great by the speed with which they operated. They were great because they did very many and very great things in a short time, using the most decisive and most expeditious means.

Similar to this rapidity that we have described is the rapidity exercised by Providence in the government of the world. But God's rapidity is much greater than every other rapidity. His Providence created all entia, placed them in an order and gave them an impulse such that this tremendous machine of the universe would produce the greatest fruit at the greatest possible speed, that is, in the least time possible.

The diffusion of the Gospel is a substantial event, and the speed of its diffusion to the furthest corners of the globe is quite astonishing, as in fact had been forecast. It seems that even in apostolic times nearly all nations had heard the good news. The divine Scriptures glorify God for this speed: 'His word runs swiftly,' as the psalm says (Ps. 147: 15), and the preachers of the Gospel and the saints are 'like arrows in the hand of a warrior' (Ps. 57); the warrior is the God-Man.

When deeply rooted idolatry had to be torn out, the quickest means was to call in the barbarians of the north and by their hand destroy the Roman empire, in whose political constitution and in the customs of the peoples that the abomination of idolatry had taken root. The evils that resulted from the invasion were virtually negligible accidents compared with the great good understood in the great plan. Mohammed's sword was also a rapid means for such a great purpose.

When the Christian world had to be cemented together out of individuals and form *Christianity*, the rapid means used by Providence was to raise up a Charlemagne and later a Gregory VII, in accord with eternal practice, of which it is written: 'The power of the earth is in the hand of God, and IN HIS TIME he will raise up a profitable ruler over it' (Sir.10: 4). Later, came Peter the Hermit and other preachers of the Crusades. Many problems came with the use of all these great instruments, but they were accidents: wisdom discounted them and pressed forward.

God often uses the most striking punishments as a tremendous means for destroying the greatest obstacles to his purpose, thus suddenly changing the face of the earth for the better. Scripture always joins the attribute of rapidity to divine chastisements: in Leviticus God says to the Hebrews: 'I will *quickly* visit you' (Lev. 26: 16). Elsewhere he says: 'Beware lest perhaps your heart be deceived... and you perish *quickly* from the excellent land, which the Lord will give you' (Deut. 11: 16-17). This is repeated many times.

Why was the life of the Lord on earth so short? — because the law of speed required the God-Man to fulfil his exalted mission in the shortest time possible. Not one single day of such a precious life was to be used more than necessary; indeed, not simply a day, not even the blink of an eye; every individual instant was counted.

For a similar reason God shortens the life of great people. It is enough that the mission given them is completed. Sometimes he does not allow them even to complete the task they are doing; granted that the work is well under way or has started and its success is assured, they are no longer necessary. Thomas Aquinas left his *Summa* incomplete; the perfection it lacked was accidental. His pen had already given to the world the whole substance of his great system that gave unity and wonderful order to the teaching of Christianity that had developed through twelve centuries. Thus St. Louis died in Africa, St. Gregory VII in exile, St. Augustine in Hippo besieged by the Vandals, St. Francis Xavier at the gates of China. Some sow, others reap.

I will give another example of the speed God employs to counter the blind speed of sense. The promptness and speed of human sensuality and ignorance likes to see the desired effect immediately, while it is God's patience, which shines brightly in the works of his mercy towards all mankind. This supreme patience is fully harmonious with and fitting to the supreme *speed* of the wisest operation.

The moral universe therefore does not amble; it hastens towards its ultimate solution, seizing and

drawing into its fast-moving vortex the intellectual and physical universes. If such speed of movement were not a most brilliant ornament of the Almighty's work, the saints would not ask for it with their urgent prayers, nor would Christ have given the petition that all people throughout all the centuries continuously make: *adveniat regnum tuum* [may your kingdom come]. For the rest the wonderful speed with which the canvas of the eternal plan unfolds is indicated in all those places of the divine Scriptures where it says that the day of the final judgment will come promptly and describes the day as if imminent: 'The great day of the Lord is near, near and hastening fast' (Zeph. 1: 14). Revelation tells us that JESUS revealed to John those things that 'must soon take place' (Rev. 1: 1), and at the end JESUS says: 'Surely I am coming soon', to which the Church replies: 'Amen. Come, Lord JESUS' (Rev. 22: 20). The end of the universe comes as soon as possible.

17.

THE LAW OF THE ACCUMULATION OF GOODS

Granted therefore as most certain that the rights of justice and equity must above all be safeguarded, I return to the subject of goodness. The question is: 'Which is more appropriate to goodness: to have goods accumulate in some people or distributed to everybody in equal quantities?' I replied that if the accumulation means that human nature acquires a greater net good, then accumulation must be preferred. But is this true in the case of government by Providence?

We will see that it is true, if we consider the way the goods are produced that Providence intends for its purpose.

How then are moral goods produced which are precisely the final goods intended by Providence

and have eudaimonological goods attached to them? In what proportion do they increase?

Moral goods, especially those in the supernatural order, increase in the way that capital increases, by trading with it. Christ said this when he made the comparison between God dispensing his treasures and a rich man distributing his capital to different servants for them to trade with it. The profit made by each servant varies according to the ability of each.

In the case of the Gospel, this ability to trade with it as capital must lie in how well disposed people are to the Gospel, and also how they use their free will as foreseen by God.

Generally speaking, and granted that all things are equal, it is fitting that God gives more goods and graces to those who not only have better dispositions for using them (both natural and supernatural dispositions) but will in fact use them better.

If however these natural and supernatural dispositions and the good use that will be made of the capital are themselves gifts of God, why does he not distribute these dispositions and good use equally?

Once again, the great law of the least means comes into play. We have seen that the gifts the Lord makes to created entia have necessarily a limited quantity, whatever this may be. We must therefore investigate whether it is more fitting for

infinite goodness *to accumulate* or *to share out* these dispositions and good use.

These considerations throw light on the gospel assertion: 'To all those who have, more will be given; but from those who have nothing, even what they have will be taken away' (Luke 19: 26). In other words, God gives new graces and new gifts to those who are well disposed to use them well. But those who are not well disposed, even the graces and gifts they have and misuse will be taken from them. When people say that 'gold makes gold' and 'one misfortune begets another', they are talking about an everyday fact, a true law of Providence. If they blame or malign Providence, they do so because they do not understand Providence's sublime reasons and are unable to raise their mind to the contemplation of them.

But there is more. If the accumulation of goods is required by the law of wisdom and, granted that an infinite wisdom presides over the government of the universe, the accumulation must necessarily be maximum. Consequently, all the goods, gifts and graces that God had destined for the human race had to be united and accumulated in one single human being (because this is the greatest possible accumulation that can be conceived), and communicated from this one being to others, poorest and most wretched as they are. And so it was. This human being is JESUS Christ. The whole, entire universe is suspended from this most simple point. True goods are found solely in him; all those who possess them possess them in him alone.

But if the law of accumulation was completely executed in Christ, the same law is executed as far as possible in other human beings to whom Christ communicates from his fullness.

Consequently, in God's eyes one person or a few can contain and often do contain more good and have more value than a countless multitude. Infinite goodness always saves the greater good when two goods cannot be saved; it prefers to save the treasure contained in one or few rather than that contained in an immense number.

18.

THE LAW OF GERM

I understand the *law of germ* as 'the decree of the Creator which ordained that goods begin in their minimum state, a state of self-containment and potency, and then evolve and become distinct through a movement proper to them'.

The law of germ has three parts:

First part of the law of germ.

God created beings in their intricate state. According to this economy, God positioned the germs of all things, or as St. Augustine calls them, the seminal reasons, at the beginning in such a way that they would develop on their own from their intricate, hidden state and thus be the causes of

their own growth and perfection.

Second part of the law of germ.

In their development the first germs produced other germs, and so on to infinity. The development effected by continually new seeds and germs is more rapid than every other because it happens through continuous multiplication. Each germ produces, and in turn each production again produces.

Third part of the law of germ.

The number of first germs was the lowest possible for the purpose. We can see how at the start few were necessary because, as I said, they were constituted to produce or posit in being germs similar to themselves. Hence, it seems that at the beginning one germ alone was sufficient for every individual species of things. It is also probable that God observed this parsimony in creation.

19.

THE ABSOLUTE MEASURE OF GOODS AND EVILS

Nevertheless, we can have a reasonable curiosity about the final result of the excellent government of creation by the law of the least means: will the quantity of good obtained at the end be much greater or only a little greater than the quantity of evil which had to be allowed in order to obtain that good?

The result is in fact very consoling. Not only will the quantity of total good exceed that of evil but,

relative to evil, it is an infinite quantity. This conclusion is drawn from the following arguments.

Evil is simply a *privation of good*, which is not an annihilation but only a diminution of good. Therefore, *pure evil* cannot exist, that is, there cannot be evil alone — some good is always necessary, which contains the evil and is reduced by the evil. Good however, which is something positive, can be *pure good* without admixture of any evil. This is to the advantage of the total good because the total of pure good must also have added to it all the good that is mixed with evil.

Moreover, there is not only and always a certain portion of good with evil (because there is an entity, a nature, and every entity, every nature is good), but there is also something good in the perverse act itself. No intelligent nature can ultimately desire anything if there is not some good in the thing. No intellectual being can wish evil as evil because evil is necessarily always *praeter intentionem agentis* [outside the intention of the agent]. This good, present in the wicked act, must also be added to the sum of good.

Furthermore, every evil is limited; there cannot be a *total evil*, precisely because, as we saw, there cannot be a *pure evil*. Evil is simply the diminution of the order in, and proper to, a finite nature. Consequently, it can do no harm except in a finite order and to a finite degree. On the other hand, there can be and there is a *total good*, which is God, and it can be possessed by the intelligent creature.

Secondly, the wicked do not know God in the same way as the just who have been raised to the supernatural order. The just know God much more and in an infinitely more excellent way than the wretched. Hence, because love and hatred are proportionate to their objects in so far as these are known, the hatred of God, and therefore the moral evil of the wicked, can never be as great as the love of God, that is, as great as the moral good of the saints. The moral good of the saints must always be greater, and beyond all comparison, than the moral evil of the wicked.

The total *moral good* therefore is far greater than the total moral evil; and *eudaimonological good* corresponds exactly to moral good, to which the order of divine justice wills the eudaimonological good to be united.

The holy person joined to God and sharing in divine nature enjoys the supernatural order. Humanity is thus raised above itself to the infinite and becomes as it were one with the infinite. Clearly therefore, the least supernatural good is immeasurably greater than all possible evil; supernatural good cannot in any way be measured against evil, which is inferior to nature. Consequently, there is more good in one human being who is in the grace of God and enjoys God than there is evil in all the wicked and all the demons put together. The total of goods is therefore infinitely greater than the total of evils.

The same applies to eudaimonological good. The least of the saints enjoys more than all that the damned and demons together suffer because each saint enjoys the infinite and in an infinite order.

But by how much is the total good increased when JESUS Christ is also placed on the scales that measure the total good? What scale in fact can measure such a weight in which are hidden 'all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge' and all the fullness of grace? The archetype of exalted humanity is realized here.

The absolute quantity of good therefore that God draws from his creature exceeds the quantity of evil by so great a degree that it is immeasurable and cannot be conceived by the human intellect. This outcome is of great consolation to poor, suffering mortals like us, and greatly justifies Providence in the permission of evils. Indeed, it effectively invites all reasonable and upright people to proclaim ceaselessly the praises of Providence.

But even after thus praising God highly because he uses his infinite wisdom in the service of his goodness, and his goodness rejoices with everlasting exultation, our thoughts turn to those most unfortunate people who are lost, and we feel pity for them as victims immolated for the universal good. We reason and ask ourselves: Is it true then that God has abandoned these individuals? Has he fatefully and inevitably sacrificed them to an eternal evil? How are they guilty of being lost through the execution of such a terrible decree?

In fact, to ask these questions indicates that everything that has already been said and fully answers them, has been virtually forgotten. However, it is to be expected that they may present themselves again to a weak spirit and wavering mind and be revived even after being solved. Despite the irrefutable reasons that have answered

and settled these supreme questions, people unfortunately still return to them due to a kind of distraction or an almost irresistible instinct. They are guided not by a calm mind but by a perturbed spirit which always seems to see in lost companions an immense object of their sympathetic compassion.

Taking account therefore of this great human weakness that is *persuaded* with difficulty, even though *reason* has no doubts, I will deal expressly with the providence that God uses towards all the individual intellectual beings he has created.

20.

PROVIDENCE RELATIVE TO INDIVIDUALS

The objection usually argues as follows: 'If obtaining the maximum overall good requires some intelligent creatures to be lost, they are lost by virtue of the decree that establishes the maximum good. Therefore, their loss is necessary, which means they are lost without their fault'. But

no reasoning could in any respect be more mistaken and weaker than this. Anyone who raises this objection is ignorant of divine operation.

The question of overall good concerns the *end* of the government of the universe.

The question concerning the good of individuals concerns the *means* because the good of individuals is the means for procuring the overall good, which in fact is the sum of the good of individuals.

The overall good is the object of *goodness*. In other words, a law of the supreme goodness of a government requires that it desire to obtain maximum possible good.

The good of individuals, besides being the object of the goodness of a government, is also the object of *justice, equity* and of *what is fitting*. Individuals must be ordered to the universal good in a *manner* that does not injure any of their rights nor does any harm to what is fitting to them; the greatest possible goodness and consideration must be exercised towards them.

The *overall good* is governed by the law of the least means that I have explained, because this good alone is precisely 'the greatest good obtained by the least means'.

The *good of individuals* is governed by other laws that originate from the relationship of the individual with the government. These laws can be summarized as: 'Government must not cause individuals any evil. It must give them all that is their

due and even more than is due, as much as possible’.

Hence, we must reconcile the solutions of these two questions so that the end of the greatest good is certainly obtained by the least means, while at the same time individuals are respected and treated with all possible goodness and generosity. It is precisely this reconciliation, this most perfect accord that shines out in the divine government of the world and makes God’s government worthy of the eternal praises that all blessed intelligences render it.

God made eternal salvation possible for all individual human beings by the following special providences.

Firstly, after God had created and constituted the heads of the human race in a state of original justice, this state, as I have said, was to have passed by means of heredity into all their descendants if the first heads had not lost it through their own free will. Thus, in the first institution, all their individual descendants were given the certain and easy means to be always good and happy.

Secondly, it is also certain that after Adam’s fall, God, although offended, did not in any way abandon human nature to itself but gratuitously promised disobedient man a Redeemer. The grace of salvation by *faith* was attached to this promise, which had to, and could, pass into the descendants. Once again, a means was gratuitously given to every single human being to escape the universal catastrophe of their perdition. But they freely neglected this second mercy as well, and the

fathers took little care to teach the children. The result was that God had to use the exemplary punishment of the flood.

Thirdly, consequently, God made Noah head of the human race and consigned to him the precious deposit of the promise that contained FAITH, that is, the means of salvation destined again for all his individual descendants. Everyone without exception would have saved themselves, up to the time of the coming of the Messiah, according to the plan of divine goodness and long-suffering, if they had wanted to make use of that gift. But for the third time many, with their free will, rejected the proffered salvation.

After respecting all the moral demands of his creatures, after carrying out everything appropriate according to justice and equity, after providing superabundantly for them and being in a position to act with total freedom, the field was open to his goodness. God could choose, and owed it to himself to choose, what his infinite goodness demanded, and nothing appropriate to individuals could limit his goodness — his goodness was able to tend directly to its essential purpose, namely, to obtain the greatest good with the least means. From that moment, the lot of individuals became subordinate to the lot of the whole because even if some were lost for the good of the whole, this was due to their own corruption that had made them undeserving of every special provision.

All that has been said leads to the conclusion that there is a *double providence*: the providence of universals and the providence of individuals, and each follows its own law.

The *providence of universals* follows the law of supreme goodness. If this is considered relative to the way it operates, it is called 'law of the least means', which I have discussed at great length in this book.

The law that follows the *providence of individuals* is that of supreme justice, equity, fittingness and conformity with the other divine attributes, which I discussed here at the end.

The reconciliation and *harmony of these two providences* and of their two laws constitutes the perfection of the government of the world.

The two providences and the two laws that guide them seem sometimes to contradict each other: *individual good* apparently clashes with *universal good*. Hence the perfection of the divine government of the world consists in observing everything that justice, fittingness and the divine attributes require in providing for each individual creature and at the same time ordering things in such proportions, relationships and correspondences that the good of individuals and the regard shown them do not in any way prevent the maximum universal good but are a very helpful means and the necessary elements for constituting it. Consequently, the universal good is supreme in all divine government, and everything serves it.

God alone understands the vastness of the government of the world and the application of the highest laws and applies them. It was my hope and desire to help human beings to be silent before the excellent and most wise Provider, not censuring him or complaining, but each day loving, adoring and

blessing ever more.

The Providence that governs
the world
With that counsel which
conquers
All created opinion before it plumbs the
depths.
(Dante, Part XI, 28-30)

21.

THE DIVINE GLORY
IS THE PURPOSE OF THE UNIVERSE

For intelligent, moral natures 'glory' means the manifestation of power, wisdom and goodness in the unity of divine operation. If God, setting aside his wisdom and goodness, had made everything with his power alone and not used his wisdom and goodness, he would have drawn no glory from it. To be powerful and use power blindly, not ordered to a good end, is not glorious.

Glory is simply the applause that intelligences give to an intelligence. But intelligences do not applaud (nor can they) pure power; they applaud the operation where power is applied with wisdom and goodness. Hence maximum glory is due to God who, when operating, must always and through his essence follow the laws of wisdom and goodness, which incline him to economize his power.

The divine glory that penetrates and shines throughout the universe is of two kinds: substantial, which is the glory God gives to himself, and accidental which intelligent beings created by God give to their creator.

Because glory is the applause that an intelligent being gives to an intelligent being when the latter operates with wisdom and goodness, the glory that God gives to himself is the approval he gives to his own works. This is expressed in Genesis by the words: 'God saw everything that he had made, and indeed, it was very good' (Gen. 1: 31).

God therefore, from all eternity, takes pleasure in his work, the world, and glories in it. He does this not through blind reality (reality is an effect of his

power), but because traces of his infinite wisdom and eternal goodness are expressed and shine forth in the world's reality. He glories because infinite power, moved by wisdom, is displayed there, and it is goodness that moves wisdom to display and diffuse itself. We also, as intelligent and moral beings (the same can be said of every intellectual creature), see the traces of wisdom and goodness in the world in varying degree. From these traces we learn to know the wisdom and goodness of the infinite craftsman; we approve them, and we applaud him and give him unending glory.

The *praise* that I have described constitutes the final moral perfection that the intelligent creature can attain, and is given by the intelligent creature to the wisdom and goodness of the Author of the world, which is the complex of contingent entia and of all their successive states. By 'praise' I mean the final act of approval which intellectual substance is inclined to carry out and voluntarily carries out when it perceives and acknowledges God's wisdom and goodness in the real signs and traces communicated to it.

But if the essence of the praise given by an intellectual being is solely the *approval* that this being pronounces interiorly, then clearly, if the object is supreme being, such praise must be the final act of the moral perfection of the creature. In fact, knowledge of the Creator is so definitely the perfection of the intellectual creature that the Christ said: 'This is eternal life, that they may KNOW you, the only true God, and JESUS Christ whom you

have sent' (John 17: 3).

The *moral perfection* of the intellectual creature is the purpose of the universe, the only purpose worthy of God. In exactly the same way, the praise or *glory of the Creator* is also the purpose of the universe.

Again, this praise, this final act of the moral perfection of the intelligent creature, this purpose of the universe, is the most sublime part of the divine exemplar of the world; everything else is ordered to its realization.

The end of the universe is that intelligent creatures should know and exalt divine wisdom and goodness. This action constitutes the divine glory.

Creatures, due to their limitation, cannot know this divine wisdom and goodness except through the works of creation where the traces of these attributes, that is, the essential laws of wisdom and goodness, clearly shine out.

In the present life, we know divine wisdom and goodness by garnering their traces from the perception of creatures, and by reflecting on this perception.

In the future life, we will know divine wisdom and goodness from the perception of the divine essence in so far as this is an act which, with infinite wisdom, produces and communicates its goodness to creatures.

It was necessary therefore that God regulated the universe according to the above laws of wisdom and goodness so that the glory that is the end of creation might be made known to and obtained by creatures.

The universe and all that happens in it, and all its successive states, are permanent in the act of the divine essence, which is their first cause. They form a single, most wise and excellent whole, which is revealed at certain levels to blessed intelligences, and are the eternal reason for the praises that these intelligences raise to their Creator and are the completion of their happiness.

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