

PROVIDENCE AND RESPONSIBILITY: THE DIVINE AND THE HUMAN IN HISTORY FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF MORAL THEOLOGY

My topic deals with providence and responsibility, the divine and the human in history, from the perspective of moral theology. Moral theology involves critical, thematic, and systematic reflection on the life and action of members of the Christian community.

Determining how to live and act as Christian believers requires one to come to grips with the topic proposed by our convention. Providence refers to divine action in human history. The problem is perennial—how do the divine and the human come together in human action and in history? Does divine providence affect human responsibility? The topic is immense and touches many aspects of our understanding of God, the transcendent, history, human agency, and the world.

This paper will consider first how Catholic moral theology has historically dealt with this problem of human responsibility and divine providence. The second part of the paper will deal with contemporary discussions about providence, and the third part will discuss implications for moral theology in the light of the first two sections.

I. HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

Providence in its etymological sense refers to God's foresight. In a more specific sense, providence sums up God's relationship to the world as knowing, willing, and executing the plan of salvation and leading the world to its decreed end. More will be said later about providence, but most commentators recognize providence as a mystery and strive to understand how the divine and the human work together.

On the more popular level, one senses that providence is invoked somewhat frequently and often as emphasizing the divine at the expense of the human and thereby downplaying human responsibility. Human passivity can easily be justified by an appeal to divine providence. Most Christians today recognize some truth in the Marxist claim that religion is the opium of the people. Not only the promise of the future life but the recognition that an all wise and powerful God has a plan for the world can contribute to the weakening of human responsibility. Anne Patrick has proposed that a literalist understanding of divine providence and of the direct intervention of God in history for some Catholics and Protestants cashes out in absolutist defenses of unborn life and passionate espousals of creationist the-

ories of the origin of the species.¹ However, an overview of Catholic moral theology indicates that providence is seldom mentioned in Catholic moral theology and that human responsibility is consistently stressed with no lessening of human responsibility because of the role of divine providence. The manuals of moral theology in use since the seventeenth century until the Second Vatican Council do not discuss providence and generally do not refer to the direct, independent intervention of God in the world. Anyone familiar with the manuals of moral theology would agree that providence plays no role in the assessment of moral conduct. The full responsibility rests with human agents. This fact calls for an explanation. Why do the manuals of Catholic moral theology not appeal to providence? Why do the manuals of moral theology not downplay human responsibility because of divine providence? The Catholic tradition in general, Thomistic philosophy and theology, and the very nature of the manuals of moral theology all help to explain why the manuals of moral theology emphasize the human responsibility of the agent and do not lessen or change this responsibility in the light of divine providence.

The Catholic theological tradition has consistently and characteristically emphasized the role of the human and its significance. Protestant thought has often accused Catholic moral theology of not giving enough importance to the divine. The perennial danger for Catholicism has not been quietism or passivity but Pelagianism. The Catholic temptation has been to give too much importance to the human and to downplay the divine role in human action. At its best, the Catholic tradition is insistent on the importance of mediation. The divine is mediated in and through the human. Thus in moral theology one should rightly expect that God does not act directly and immediately in the world but in and through the human. Likewise, human beings must accept full responsibility for their actions.

The Thomistic tradition explicates the meaning of mediation in areas of importance to moral theology and in its understanding of providence. Anthropology, natural law, and an intrinsic understanding of morality develop the concept of mediation in Catholic thought as exemplified in the work of Thomas Aquinas. The divine is not seen as subtracting from full human responsibility. The first part of the *Summa* of Thomas Aquinas treats of God, while the second part turns its attention to human beings. Aquinas' prologue to the *Prima Secundae* spells out the Thomistic anthropology—the human being is an image of God precisely in so far as the human being is endowed with intellect, free will, and the power of self-determination.² The human being images God not by obeying God's law but by being the principle of one's own action through intellect and free will. The Thomistic position on anthropology thus avoids the two extremes of a pseudo-Augustinianism, which sees the human being as really moved extrinsically by God, and a philosophical Aristotelianism, which sees the human being as the principle of one's own actions without any relationship to God. Aquinas brings the divine and the human together by seeing the human being as an image of and participation in the divine to the extent that the human being is the principle of one's own operations and actions through intellect and free will.

¹Anne E. Patrick, "Dimensions of the Abortion Debate," in Patricia Beattie Jung and Thomas A. Shannon, eds., *Abortion and Catholicism: The American Debate* (New York: Crossroad, 1988) 177.

²Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* (Rome: Marietti, 1952) *IaIIae*, Prologue, 1.

Natural law is not the primary ethical category for Thomas Aquinas, but it does occupy a significant position in his thought.³ For Thomas Aquinas, divine providence works in and through the natural law. The world is governed by divine providence. This plan of God for the world can properly be called the eternal law because law is the dictate of practical reason in the one who governs. Human beings as rational creatures are subject to divine providence in a most excellent way, in so far as they partake of a share of providence by being provident both for themselves and for others. Since human beings have a natural inclination to their proper act and end, they participate in eternal reason. This participation of the eternal law in the rational creature is called the natural law. Providence works in and through the natural law and in no way can be seen in opposition to the natural law.⁴ I think the most accurate and succinct statement of Thomistic natural law is the following—human reason directing human beings to their end in accord with their nature. According to this understanding, the plan of God for the world is mediated in and through the natural law. Human beings alone are responsible for determining how to act in this world and the norm of such action is based on human reason reflecting on human nature. The responsibility rests with the human being to discover what is morally good and to act in accord with the good.

The intrinsic character of Thomistic ethics stands out from the very structure of the ethical discussion in the *Prima Secundae* of the *Summa*. The treatise begins with the question of the ultimate end of human beings.⁵ The answer to this question is happiness. Morality is not something imposed from outside by a divine decree or command but rather the true self-fulfillment of the human being. Happiness means that one has come to the fulfillment of one's own nature. The principle of finality as one of the cornerstones of Thomistic ethics brings into sharp relief the intrinsic character of this moral theory. Thomistic morality has been attacked for being eudaimonistic, but this very charge certainly highlights the intrinsic character of Thomistic morality. Morality is not something imposed from the outside but rather involves what is good for the human being.

Thomas Aquinas strongly opposes an extrinsic understanding of morality according to which something is good because it is commanded. For Aquinas, something is commanded because it is good. The Thomistic understanding of law well illustrates the intrinsic nature of Thomistic morality.⁶ Law is not primarily an act of the will of the legislator but an act of reason ordering to the common good. Voluntaristic approaches tend to be extrinsicist, but the emphasis in Aquinas is on human reason and its role. Thus the eternal law is God's ordering which is made known by human reasoning in the natural law. An intrinsic morality based on human reason mediating the divine reason puts the understanding of the moral requirement squarely and fully in the hands of the human agent.

I personally have criticized a number of aspects of Thomistic ethics but not its emphasis on mediation and the general approaches which fill out mediation in ethics. Thomistic thought lacks historical consciousness and a more historical appre-

³Ibid., q. 94.

⁴Ibid., q. 91, a. 1, 2.

⁵Ibid., q. 1.

⁶Ibid., q. 90.

ciation of human development. In connection with this problem, the ethical methodology in Thomism tends to be much too deductive. Not enough importance is given to the person and to the subject. However, despite these and other criticisms, I find myself in basic agreement with the Thomistic emphasis on the human as mediating the divine. The human being has full moral responsibility for understanding the requirements of morality.

The Thomistic notion of providence likewise insists on human mediation of the divine. Providence too is understood teleologically and in the light of reason and not of the will. "Now to rule or govern by providence is simply to move things toward an end through understanding."⁷ For providence two things are required—the ordering and the execution of the order. God is the cause of operations for all things that operate. But the basic Thomistic insistence on mediation stands out in the recognition that the execution of divine providence is accomplished by means of secondary causes. Secondary causality thus gives the human causes their proper role. God and the human must work together and God's causality is not independent of human causality.⁸ Aquinas deals with three major issues that are perennially raised in discussions of providence—contingency, freedom, and evil. Again, mediation is invoked. Precisely the secondary causality of human and natural agents serves as the basis for dealing with these problems. The basic principle about the possibility of evil is succinctly explained. A defect can occur because of the defect of the secondary agent. The product of a perfectly skilled artisan might be defective because of a defect in the instrument used.⁹ Divine providence likewise does not exclude contingency from things precisely because of the secondary causes. God has created human beings with their freedom. God has to respect the freedom that was given to the creatures no matter what will happen as a result. If God preserves contingency in natural things which is due to imperfections in the natural causes, there is all the more reason for God to preserve free will since free will pertains to the perfection of the human. Since the human being attains the divine likeness by acting freely, providence should not take away this freedom.¹⁰ Thus Aquinas uses his understanding of mediation and secondary causality to deal with the problems raised against providence by contingency, freedom, and evil.

Providence thus understood as working through secondary causes does not take away from human responsibility. Again one can and should criticize the Thomistic approach to solving some of the problems inherent in the mystery of providence, but the Thomistic notion of providence does not change, alter, or take away from human freedom and full human responsibility for action in this world. Providence works in and through the natural law.

Thomas Aquinas in his understanding of providence appeals to the consequent will of God. The consequent will of God takes into account the free response of human beings. Thomas and the Catholic tradition have always been able to avoid

⁷Saint Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles, Book Three: Providence, Part I* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1975) chapter 64, 210.

⁸Ibid., chapter 71, 237ff.

⁹Ibid., chapter 77, 258ff.

¹⁰Ibid., chapter 73, 244ff.

the danger of predestination precisely because of the recognition of the freedom of human causes and the consequent will of God. God does not will eternal damnation for some apart from their own free human acts. For Thomas, divine knowledge of what human beings will do does not take away from the freedom of the human choice. God as transcendent sees all things as present even though they are future to us.¹¹

Within the manuals of moral theology, providence is usually not discussed and human responsibility for all human actions is assumed. The manuals departed in some significant ways from the Thomistic approach but the points made above continue to have some influence on the manuals. In general, the manuals of moral theology, which came into being after the Council of Trent, based morality on the natural law which was the same source for all humankind. The moral life was seen as the responsibility of the moral being to live in accord with the natural law. There was no mention of any diminishment or altering of human responsibility because of divine agency.

Moreover, human responsibility was stressed by the ecclesial contexts which shaped these manuals. These textbooks of moral theology were practical handbooks to train confessors to exercise their function in the sacrament of penance, especially the role of judging the existence of sins and their gravity. The Catholic tradition has characteristically understood sin primarily as a morally bad action and thus the responsibility of the Christian person. The understanding of the sacrament of penance stressed human responsibility for one's own actions. The broader theological contexts of the manuals rested on the Catholic understanding that one's actions and life in this world determine one's eternal destiny. Without a doubt, the textbooks of moral theology strongly accepted and endorsed the role of merit in the Christian life. Thus the whole theological and ecclesial contexts of the manuals of moral theology stressed human responsibility for human actions. Again contemporary Catholic theologians have rightly pointed out the many deficiencies of the manualistic tradition, but the tradition did emphasize human responsibility for moral actions and did not reduce that responsibility or do away with it in the name of divine providence or divine action.

I can recall only one relevant discussion of direct and immediate divine intervention in human affairs in the manuals of moral theology and in the earlier Catholic tradition itself. The question under consideration was the immutability of natural law. According to the traditional understanding, the natural law is necessary, universal, and unchangeable for all human beings. Questions were raised about possible changes in the natural law based on scriptural incidents such as God's commanding Abraham to kill his son, God's commanding the Israelites to take things from the Egyptians, God's commanding Hosea to engage in fornication. In accord with the scriptural exegesis of the times, such scriptural incidents were em-

¹¹Thomas Aquinas, *Summa*, Ia, q. 19, a. 6; q. 14, a. 13. For a summary of the position of Thomas Aquinas as contrasted with that of Augustine, see John H. Wright, "Providence," in Joseph A. Komonochak, et al., eds., *New Dictionary of Theology* (Wilmington DE: Michael Glazier, 1987) 815-18. For a somewhat different perspective, see Brian L. Hebblethwaite, "Some Reflections on Predestination, Providence and Divine Foreknowledge," *Religious Studies* 15 (1979) 433-48.

barrassing problems for the Catholic moral tradition precisely because they seemed to go against the natural law prescriptions.

The response of Thomas Aquinas in the *Summa* to this problem is fascinating. Aquinas recognizes that the natural law can change by additions being made to it, but the real problem involves subtractions from the natural law. Can something cease to be condemned by the natural law? The Angelic Doctor distinguishes the primary principles of the natural law which are totally immutable from the secondary principles. Since the secondary principles are conclusions from the primary principles, they can admit of some exceptions in a very few instances. Since God is the giver of life, the creator of all goods, and the author of marriage, the acts done in these cases under the command of God are not the forbidden acts of killing, stealing, or fornication. Note that in this explanation God is not intervening to change the natural law or to give dispensations from it.¹²

Marcellino Zalba, one of the last manualists in the Catholic tradition, flatly denies any possibility of a proper change in the natural law, which means that the matter concerned would be the same but the obligation would cease. Such a change could not even be done by a direct intervention by God who is the supreme legislator. God would be contradicting God's self by so doing. Some argue that an improper change in the natural law can occur precisely because the matter involved and the circumstances can change. Such a change can only occur in the secondary principles of the natural law which concerns not the end but means to the end. The scriptural exceptions mentioned above are thus explained in this way. God could give to another the dominion or power that God has. However, Zalba prefers to say that there cannot be even an improper change in natural law if the law itself is completely and adequately formulated. Thus, for example, one cannot directly kill an innocent person on one's own authority.¹³

The Catholic tradition and the manualists did in the case of the Scriptures and on the basis of their literal interpretation of the Scriptures recognize that God could command individuals to do certain acts which might appear to violate the natural law. But Thomas Aquinas in the *Summa* did not want to see these resulting actions as a violation of or dispensation from natural law. In a legalistic and voluntaristic approach such actions could be readily understood as dispensations or exceptions made by the divine legislator. The manualists were undoubtedly more voluntaristic and extrinsicist in their moral theory than Aquinas, but as Zalba's summary of the tradition and his own position show the solution to the problem was not proposed in terms of God as legislator giving a dispensation or exemption from the natural law. The theologians in the Thomistic tradition did not want to admit such dispensations from or exceptions to the natural law could be made by God.

Further evidence from the Catholic tradition supports the claim that a belief in divine providence did not affect the understanding of human responsibility and the moral conduct of how individual believers and the believing community should act in particular situations. For the last two decades Catholic theologians have been discussing the question which I have described as whether or not there is a unique

¹²Thomas Aquinas, *Summa*, Ia IIae, q.94, a.5; q.100, a.8, ad 3um.

¹³Marcellinus Zalba, *Theologia Moralis Summa I: Theologia Moralis Fundamental* (Madrid: Biblioteca de Autores Cristianos, 1952) 352-55.

content to Christian morality.¹⁴ Is there one moral order for Christians and another for all others? In Germany, the question has been debated between the supporters of an autonomous ethic and those proposing a faith ethic. I first approached the issue in the United States from the perspective of social morality and ethics in a pluralistic society and I argued against any unique Christian morality which *per se* is not available to all others. Despite the contemporary discussions on these issues, general agreement exists that the manuals of moral theology do not propose a unique moral content for Christian morality. The moral norm was the same for Christians as for all others.¹⁵

The manuals of moral theology did not address the question of providence and responsibility, the divine and the human in history, in the same way as contemporary theologians discuss it. The involvement of the moral agent is described not as responsibility but in terms of knowing and acting in accord with God's law. Life in this world is ruled by natural law which is the participation of the eternal law in the rational creature. Through human reason reflecting on human nature, human beings can determine what they are to do and what God wants them to do. The understanding of natural law coheres with the understanding of providence as based on mediation and the fact that God works through secondary causes. Providence thus in theory does not by itself alter or change human responsibility to discover and act in accord with natural law. The general tendency within the tradition denies that God could grant dispensations from or exceptions to the natural law because in so doing God would contradict God's self. Thus a belief in providence does not affect the requirements of human morality in this world, for providence in the Thomistic tradition works through the natural law.

II. CONTEMPORARY DISCUSSIONS ABOUT PROVIDENCE

Contemporary discussions about divine providence deal primarily with history and the divine and the human in history. Recall that the Thomistic tradition in Catholic theology did not give enough recognition to historical consciousness and Catholic moral theology did not develop an historical sense. The discussions of providence did not deal primarily with history but with the freedom and causality of natural and human agents. Providence in the Protestant tradition and in the more current discussions is more intimately related with the question of history. Christians believe that Jesus is the sovereign of history. Divine sovereignty rules over history. Divine providence sees the goodness, wisdom, and power of God using history for the divine purpose.

Much of the contemporary discussions about providence in history comes from the Protestant and especially the Reformed tradition. These traditions have historically stressed the role of the divine and often accused the Catholic tradition of

¹⁴For an in depth discussion of this controversy, see Vincent MacNamara, *Faith and Ethics: Recent Roman Catholicism* (Washington DC: Georgetown University Press, 1985). I disagree with some of MacNamara's interpretations, but this book remains the best study of the debate in English.

¹⁵Franciscus Hurth and Petrus M. Abellan, *De Principiis, De Virtutibus et Praeceptis*, vol. I (Rome: Pontifical Gregorian University Press, 1948) 43.

Pelagianism. The Reformed tradition at one time contained a belief in predestination which was never accepted in the Catholic tradition. The sovereignty and the glory of God remain important concepts for many in the Reformed tradition. The evangelical Protestant tradition shares much of the same emphasis today but such an approach is based on a more literal reading of the scriptures.

Contemporary discussions over providence and the divine and human in history continue to reckon with the three issues discussed by Thomas Aquinas—contingency, free will, and evil. The contingency question has come to the fore in discussions about evolution and the prehistory of humanity. Providence often talked about a divine plan and purpose in the universe. The modern scientific theories often stress randomness and contingency in the evolutionary development leading to human beings. Such randomness appears to deny a divine plan or purpose in history.¹⁶

Human free will and evil have been the factors most discussed in relation to providence on the contemporary scene. In the face of monstrous evil, God appears as either powerless or malevolent. Two historical realities in contemporary history have touched off debates about divine providence and even the existence of God—the Holocaust and the danger of nuclear destruction of the world.

The Holocaust poses great problems for a people who believe in the God of the Covenant who has chosen a people for God's own. How could such a God stand powerless as six million Jews were killed? How could one even believe in God after Auschwitz? This event has shaken the Jewish community of faith as no other historical event.¹⁷ Some have come to the conclusion that belief in God is no longer possible. Others have changed their understanding of God but still are believers. Believers have had to wrestle with the Holocaust but not only Jewish believers. After all, Christians were the agents in the Holocaust so Christians must face the horror and tragedy of the Holocaust in a very involved way.

The fear of nuclear annihilation has also raised questions about providence.¹⁸ In the earlier part of the twentieth century, science was looked upon as the engine of a progressive development of human history. Some argued against the concept of providence and even the existence of God because there was no need for God in the light of all that science and human beings could accomplish. However, the nuclear threat has now underscored the demonic in history and in science and technology. Now for the first time in human history human beings have the power to destroy the world as we know it.

The Holocaust and the threat of nuclear annihilation are not the only events that call into question the meaning and existence of divine providence. The evils

¹⁶Barrie Britten, "Evolution by Blind Chance," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 39 (1986) 341-60.

¹⁷For a recent overview of some of this important literature, see Alan L. Berger, "Holocaust and History," *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 25 (1988) 194-211.

¹⁸Richard Bauckham, "Theology After Hiroshima," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 38 (1985) 583-601. The threat of nuclear annihilation has brought eschatological questions to the fore. See, for example, L. Shannon Jung, "Nuclear Eschatology," *Theology Today* 40 (1983-1984) 184-89; Andrew J. Wergeit, "Christian Eschatological Identities and the Nuclear Context," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 27 (June 1988) 175-91.

of famine, ecological threats, terrorism, genocide, and many of the stories we read in our daily newspaper always raise the same basic question. Is God powerless in the face of all this evil? What does this silence say about God?

Such questions have raised significant issues for contemporary theology. Many of the tensions in the Catholic Church today center on moral theology. However, in the question of providence under discussion here, I am happy to report that moral theology is not at the center of the discussion!

Systematic theology and the theology of God in particular are at the focus of contemporary discussions about providence. Providence has traditionally been associated with central attributes of God—goodness, wisdom, power. These questions about providence quickly become questions about God. Some Jewish believers can no longer believe in God after the Holocaust. Gordon Kaufmann has developed a new understanding of God in the light of the nuclear threat of annihilation.¹⁹ Many have reconsidered the classical theism to account for a God who suffers and changes in response to the sufferings of God's people. Contemporary theologies of God stress the absence of God and the hiddenness of God in human experience and history.

Discussions about providence thus naturally include significant questions about the meaning and existence of God, but providence itself has also been a topic for some significant contemporary thinking. Many today propose an understanding of providence which does not entail the direct, independent divine intervention in human history. Langdon Gilkey, for example, understands providence in a non-interventionist manner as the universal divine activity of the preservation and continuity of creaturely being over time, as the ground of self-actualizing freedom, and as the creative source of new possibilities in each situation. In addition, contemporary experience reminds us of the further role of providence as the principle of judgment or nemesis on the distorted elements of what human freedom has created. The tragedy and nemesis are not the final word. To have faith in providence is to expect new possibilities despite tragedy and suffering. However, providence must not be seen alone but requires the supplement of incarnation, atonement, and eschatology.²⁰

Within the Catholic tradition, Karl Rahner continues to emphasize the Thomistic concept that God works through secondary causes. Rahner here employs his understanding of God as the transcendental ground of the world. The distinction between the transcendental and the categorical is used to explain the mystery of the transcendence and immanence of God. The distinguished German Jesuit theologian refers to divine intervention in the world in quotation marks. A special "intervention" of God can only be understood as the historical concreteness of the transcendental communication of God which is already intrinsic to the concrete world. When we as believers believe that God hears our prayers or inter-

¹⁹Gordon Kaufmann, "Nuclear Eschatology and the Study of Religion," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 51 (1983) 3-14.

²⁰Langdon Gilkey, *Reaping the Whirlwind: A Christian Interpretation of History* (New York: Seabury Press, 1981). This has been the most significant monograph on providence in Christian theology in the last two decades. For a summary of his understanding of providence, see 264ff.

venes in history, this does not mean that what is immediately tangible in these "interventions" does not exist in a functional relationship with the world or that it could not be explained causally. Such things are not in principle removed from the causal relationships of the world.²¹

Contemporary discussions about providence create significant and important questions for spirituality. In keeping with contemporary religious experience, spirituality today often emphasizes the absence of God and the apophatic experience of God as contrasted with the presence of God.²² Christian prayer in the face of the absence of God and the apparent powerlessness of God in the midst of human suffering often becomes a prayer of desperation or of a lament.²³ Where is God while all of this is happening? In addition much discussion is concentrated on the prayer of petition and its meaning in the light of an understanding of providence which excludes the immediate, direct divine intervention in the world. A noninterventionist theory of providence does not result in a deistic understanding of a God who created the world and no longer cares about it. The divine is always active and present in history as the persuasive lure to human activity. However, this providential and caring God accepts the freedom of secondary causes. God does care about us and works for our well-being personally and corporately, but God does not unilaterally interfere in the world apart from secondary causes. Many abuses have been and are connected with the prayer of petition. Often the purpose of petition fosters the concept of an interventionist God and creates a passivity among the Christian people. The prayer of petition should never be the primary Christian form of prayer, but it still has a proper place even within the context of holding to no direct immediate intervention by God in human affairs.²⁴

The practical consequences of contemporary discussions about God and providence loom large and significant. On the pastoral level, providence has often been used to support a one-sided passivity in Christian life and a failure to take responsibility for life. Much work must be done in shaping the daily life of believers to follow the old spiritual axiom: Work as if everything depended on you and pray as if everything depended on God. This spiritual adage is quite compatible with contemporary theories of providence which deny any direct, immediate intervention of God in human history.

III. IMPLICATIONS FOR MORAL THEOLOGY

The first section of this paper pointed out that the Thomistic tradition in moral theology saw no opposition between providence and the human norm for moral action precisely because God's providence governs human beings through the natural law which is the participation of the eternal law in the rational creature. The

²¹Karl Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith: An Introduction to the Idea of Christianity* (New York: Seabury Press, 1978) 86ff.

²²William H. Shannon, *Thomas Merton's Dark Path* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1987).

²³Donal Dorr, *Spirituality and Justice* (Maryknoll NY: Orbis Books, 1984) 217-35.

²⁴Jack A. Keller, "On Providence and Prayer," *Christian Century* 104 (Nov. 4, 1987) 967-69. Keller here relies on Gilkey's understanding of providence.

manuals of Catholic theology because of their practical purposes did not discuss the meaning of providence but constantly stressed the role of the human in discovering God's plan and did not appeal to divine interventions to change or alter the natural law. It is probably true that people in the manualist tradition would have accepted some direct divine intervention in history, but they did not use such direct divine intervention to alter what natural law requires human beings to do in this world. Many contemporary theological explanations of providence deny any direct divine intervention in human history. One coming out of the Catholic tradition in moral theology would find such an understanding somewhat congenial. To prove this understanding of providence lies beyond the limits of this paper. I will accept such an approach to providence and the human role in history. This section will discuss the implications of such an understanding of providence for three areas of moral theology—the theology and meaning of history, an understanding of power, and the invocation of providence in human decision making.

Theology and the meaning of history. One can only approach the meaning of history with fear and trembling. Perhaps no area of Christian thinking has seen more mistakes than the meaning of history. From the theological perspective, the meaning of history is intimately connected with eschatology and the relationship between the present and the future of the reign of God.

In the very beginning of Christianity a mistaken view of the meaning of history appeared. Without a doubt, the early church in general expected the end of the world to come quickly. Such a view that the end time was immanent colored much of the early church's position on questions about life in this world and history. The expected shortness of life and of history naturally disparaged and downplayed the meaning and significance of human existence in this world.

Apocalyptic views have frequently appeared in the course of Christianity, according to which God was to come at the end of time to destroy the world and everything in it and bring in the fullness of God's reign. There has hardly been a century go by without many people predicting that the cataclysmic end of the world was coming at a particular time.

Twentieth century Christians in the West and especially in the United States often went to the opposite extreme in proposing a progressive view of history which was steadily evolving to make the kingdom of God more present in this world. Liberal Protestantism is often associated with such a progressive view of history which is so often attacked today.²⁵

Within Roman Catholicism, much contemporary theology, spirituality, and social ethics have rightly stressed the relationship between the reign of God and historical, political, and social human existence in this world. The Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World condemned the split or dichotomy between faith and daily life that so often permeated Catholic self-understanding up to that time.²⁶ Recall that even as late as the 1950s, there continued to be a

²⁵Mention should be made of Reinhold Niebuhr's criticism of Protestant liberalism, but even Niebuhr retained some liberal presuppositions. See Ruth L. Smith, "Reinhold Niebuhr and History: The Elusive Liberal Critique," *Horizons* 15/2 (1988) 283-98.

²⁶Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, par. 43, in Austin Flannery, ed., *Vatican Council II: The Conciliar and Post Conciliar Documents* (Northport NY: Costello Publishing Co., 1975) 943.

debate between so-called incarnationist and eschatological approaches to the world and to Christian spirituality. The eschatological approach gave no importance or significance to what happened in history and in the world. At best the world and history constituted a stage on which salvation took place. Life in this world was merely passing the time while waiting for the fullness of salvation to come at the end of time.²⁷ The Second Vatican Council developed a theology of earthly realities and of history that had begun to appear in the previous decades. However, the approach of the Second Vatican Council to history is not above criticism. The Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World correctly tried to relate the gospel, grace, and the supernatural to history and life in this world. I agree with the basic thrust of this correction, but the council document did not avoid the danger of seeing everything as grace and failed to recognize fully the finitude, the imperfection, the sin, and the lack of completeness existing in human history. One could charge the constitution with suffering from a chronic case of collapsed eschatology.

The first part of the constitution deals with the church and the human vocation and divides the discussion into four chapters dealing with the human person, human community, human activity in the world, and the role of the church in the modern world.²⁸ The fundamental structure of the two chapters on the human person and the human community treats the subject in the light of creation by God and also mentions human sinfulness but ends with a christological perspective. Christ as the new human being in the discussion of the human person in the first instance and the incarnate word and human solidarity in the case of the human community are the culminating points of these chapters. But notice there is no development of the fullness of the reign of God as future and coming at the end of time and history. The third chapter, thanks to revisions made on the council floor during debate, does bring in the fullness of the reign of God as future. We do not know the time of the consummation of the earth and of humanity. We do not know how things will be transformed, but the world as deformed by sin will pass away.²⁹ One can understand how this constitution could easily succumb to the overoptimism of the times, but at least the framers of the document partially recognized the problem.

One easily recognizes how fraught with danger is the enterprise of developing a theology and an understanding of history. Theological, philosophical, and experiential perspectives together with one's understanding of providence contribute to the approach to the meaning of history. From the theological perspective, I insist on seeing the divine working in history in terms of the many different Christian realities and symbols that are present. I believe that theological problems arise most often not so much from positive error as from the failure to consider all the aspects that are present in a situation. Thus I try to understand history in the light of the stance I have proposed for moral theology. The Christian looks at the world and history in light of the fivefold Christian mysteries and symbols of creation,

²⁷John Courtney Murray, *We Hold These Truths: Catholic Reflections on the American Proposition* (Kansas City: Sheed and Ward, 1960) 175-96.

²⁸"Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World," in Flannery, 912-38.

²⁹*Ibid.*, par. 39, 938.

sin, incarnation, redemption, and resurrection destiny. God is the creator and sustainer of the world and all in it. Sin affects everything human and will always be present. By the incarnation, everything human becomes associated with the work of Jesus. The redeeming power of God as manifested in Jesus and the Spirit is already operative in our world and in our history. However, the fullness of the reign of God under the symbol of resurrection destiny is not present in this world. It is precisely the destiny to which we are called. An adequate theology of history must recognize all these various aspects present in human existence and history. If someone puts undue emphasis on one of these symbols, the theology of history will be distorted.

In the philosophical perspective, history involves both destiny and freedom.³⁰ The individual and human communities are always affected by and even limited by the historical forces at work. Experience reminds us that often we respond to situations that we did not create and that we cannot completely change. But at the same time, through freedom, people are able to change the course of history and time. History involves a strange combination of destiny and freedom. Precisely because of the freedom aspect, one cannot speak above the laws of history. Yet the destiny of history limits and conditions what one can do in any given situation.

Experience seems to verify the understanding of history sketched out above. The evil and the horror in history are evident to all in our contemporary times. Today no one has need to prove the presence and the power of evil. But we also experience the power of good in history. For example, our world has become more conscious of human rights, both political and social, than at any time in the past. The eyes of faith can see redemption at work in human history. Evil at times has been changed into good. Suffering has been a redeeming experience. But at the same time we must recognize that at times evil seems to conquer. One is often amazed by the realization that history so often repeats itself with domination by the powerful against the weak, but we are constantly surprised by new possibilities and developments. Perhaps the U.S.A. is becoming more aware of its own problems and rationalizations; institutional changes have taken place in many countries, but some revolutions soon falter and become part of the power elite against the oppressed. Experience thus points out all the manifold dimensions and possibilities of history. However, even in this understanding there always remains the hope of redeeming possibilities. The oppressed and the downtrodden rightly can have such hopes precisely because of our understanding of the power of redemption which is always present in our world despite the presence of sin. From the Christian perspective, sin is never the last word.

The understanding of providence proposed here underscores that God works through secondary causes and accepts both human freedom and evil. God does not directly and immediately intervene to do away with such freedom and evil. In the light of these presuppositions, some parameters for a theology and understanding of history can be drawn.

First, human history will never see the fullness of the reign of God. History will always involve the penultimate. The stance with its insistence on the symbol of resurrection destiny as beyond the present means that the future reign of God

³⁰Gilkey, *Reaping the Whirlwind*, 91-114.

always lies beyond history. Also, the understanding of divine providence as respectful of human freedom means that history will never be purely identical with the reign of God. Freedom and evil will always be present in human history.

If history can never be identified with the fullness of the reign of God, history can never be seen as totally opposed to the reign of God. Creation, incarnation, and redemption are at work in history so that history will share in the good represented by these symbols.

History then will know both good and evil. Even in the midst of evil the possibility of redemption is always present. Experience and theology tell us of the possibility of redemption and even of somewhat radical change within the historical parameters. However, at the same time the greatest historical good is always threatened by the seeds of its own destruction and abuse.

But the question must be pushed. Is there any truly human progress in history or is history just cyclic? A progressive view of history emphasizing continuing evolutionary progress does not make sense. However, on balance, I propose that there has been some progress in human history. Progress exists within the contexts of many reversals and in the midst of the continuing danger and threat of evil. At times evil does overcome and triumph over the good. The theological basis for my acceptance of some progress in history comes from the realities of creation and incarnation and from the fact that the redemptive power of God as overcoming sin is already operative even though it is far from complete. I do not espouse an easy optimism about history but on balance I think there has been some progress. We are all called to work for greater historical progress as our responsibility in responding to the gifts of God to us.

As an example, take the Enlightenment. At times, many people in the first world looked upon the Enlightenment as the apex of history. Today many correctly look very negatively on the Enlightenment understanding. One can rightly disagree with many aspects of the Enlightenment, but in my judgment, its emphasis on human rights was a significant step forward in history. Yes, the danger of individualism was present at the same time. Yes, women and minorities were denied rights. Yes, economic and social rights were neglected. But the insistence on human rights even in the narrow perspective of male political rights has been an important contribution to subsequent ages. Political and civil rights are very important, but they are not enough for human beings who also need economic and social rights. In the long run, I see some progress in history, but such progress is always threatened and does not emerge in a progressive, evolutionary development.

Remarkable revisions and changes are possible in history. Such an approach gives hope to the downtrodden and the oppressed. The economically poor of the Third World have shown us ways of concretely overcoming their poverty despite all the obstacles against it. In our own country we have the example of the black revolution which, however, still falls far short of its full development. Somewhat dramatic changes have been made in our culture and society in the last decade or so with regard to the role of women, but the patriarchal structures are still strong. Yes, there have been developments and there is always hope for redeeming the present situation, but imperfection, sin, and the lack of completeness, as well as the difficulty of overcoming historical destiny, will always be present. Even the best movements and developments are never perfect and always subject to the im-

perfection of finitude and the destroying force of evil. Some redemption and change in history are possible and inspire hope, but at the same time vigilance and watchfulness must strive to protect against the propensity to evil which is ever present in human history.

A parenthesis about a related matter seems to be appropriate at this time. From the time of the Reformation to the period immediately preceding the Second Vatican Council, Catholic self-understanding not only did not accept a progressive view of history but generally opposed the historical developments that had taken place. In fact, within Roman Catholicism, many people accepted an understanding of history which saw the Middle Ages as the golden period. Such a point was well brought out in James Walsh's famous book which received wide circulation in the United States in the beginning of this century: *The Thirteenth—Greatest of Centuries*.³¹ From this perspective, the historical developments that occurred after the Middle Ages all seemed to depart further and further from these ideal times. Often the danger or enemy was described as individualistic freedom. The Reformation brought this individualistic freedom to the role of religion by freeing people from the authority of the church. The philosophical revolution of the Enlightenment freed people from the law of God and made human beings the creators of their own morality. The political revolutions associated with the French revolution and the rise of democracy substituted the will of the majority for the will of God. One should also point out that in a consistent manner some of these people strongly criticized the economic revolution of capitalism as individualistic freedom run wild in the economic sphere. Capitalism believed that individuals could accrue great profits and not worry about the rights of workers and others. A defensive, ghetto Catholicism tended to see the modern world and history as evil and protected itself against such evils.

However, in one area it seems that Roman Catholicism has uncritically accepted a very progressive view of history. I am referring to the understanding of historical developments with regard to the structure of the church itself. One must note the irony between the Catholic opposition to what was happening in human history with its very progressive view of what was occurring with regard to the history of the church and its evolving structures. Perhaps such differences can be explained by the overdefensiveness of the church itself and its failure to recognize at times its own sinfulness. I am in accord with the basic Catholic theological insistence on the importance of historical development with regard to our understanding of the message of Jesus and the church itself. However, the Catholic self-understanding at its best has always recognized that not every historical development has been to the good and there is need for a critical analysis of these developments. Specifically there can be no doubt that by the middle of the twentieth century, the Roman Catholic Church was more centralized and authoritarian than it had ever been before in its history. I believe that many of the tensions in the church today involving authority and especially the tensions between theologians and the teaching office in the church can be explained somewhat by the continuing acceptance of this overcentralized and authoritarian understanding of the church.

³¹James Walsh, *The Thirteenth—The Greatest of Centuries* (New York: Catholic Summer School Press, 1907).

History reminds us how many developments have occurred in church structure over the years. The omnipresence of the papacy in the life of the church is obviously a new tradition of development and not in keeping with the best of the Catholic tradition.

In moral theology there is no doubt that the papacy has played a very increasing role in determining Catholic teaching in moral areas. Moral theology could well use studies indicating how church authority was exercised in moral matters over the years. Interventions of the papal teaching office in moral matters have become much greater in this time since the Reformation. The involvement of the papal teaching office in moral matters was never greater than in the twentieth century. Again one can see why there might be need for a more universal teaching authority to be exercised in the light of the greater consciousness of the universal world in which we live. However, such involvements by the papal teaching office and especially the way in which the papal teaching office has been exercised have created some of the unnecessary tensions in the life of the Catholic Church today. However, these developments toward a centralized and overauthoritarian papal office frequently involved in specific moral questions have practically been unquestioned until recently. Such a view of history sharply contrasts with the view of human history which the Catholic Church was developing at the same time. In my understanding of a theology of history, I think it is also important for us to apply some of the same understanding of history to historical developments within the church itself. Much more needs to be said about this issue and historical studies are badly needed to see how the church has exercised its teaching role with regards to moral matters in the past. This parenthetical discussion in this paper can only point to the problem and call for further study.

Power. The concept and reality of power are intimately connected with the subject of divine providence and the human and divine in history.³² God has often been described as omnipotent. Human power is important and necessary to change history. However, many contemporary approaches to providence in history stress the absence of God and the powerlessness of God in human history. Jesus is often invoked as an example of the powerlessness of God, since Jesus was put to death on the cross. The historical problem comes to the fore from the experiences of so many people in our world who know nothing but powerlessness and marginalization in the political, economic, and cultural spheres.

Three significant points can be made about the present discussion about power. First, power as seen in God and humans is not the same as control and domination of others. Those who have power should strive to empower others. The traditional Catholic theological emphasis on mediation and providence highlights the need to use power to empower and not to control or dominate. God empowers human beings to share in God's gracious love. By respecting human freedom and secondary causality, God does not seek to control or dominate human beings. So too in human history, power cannot be seen as power over but as power with. Human responsibility calls upon us to empower all human beings to participate in devel-

³²Larry Rasmussen is involved in an in-depth study of power from the perspective of Christian ethics. See his paper delivered at the 1989 meeting of the Society of Christian Ethics, "Divine and Human Power in a New Era: Theological Reflections."

oping their own lives and the lives of society. Liberation theology in its many different contexts emphasizes the need of empowerment.

Second, in the context of powerlessness and the understanding of history proposed above, great emphasis has been placed on the powerlessness of God. Put very boldly, God is powerless to intervene directly in human history. For many people today, the experience of the absence and powerlessness of God is very real. The oppressed of the world who are so numerous know that God in Jesus can be present to them in their powerlessness. However, one must be very careful not to draw the wrong conclusions from our consciousness and experience of the powerlessness of God. The empowering work of God will be mediated by free human beings. The crucifixion reminds us of the powerlessness of Jesus, but the crucifixion cannot become the only paradigm of the divine-human relationship. The crucifixion is part of the total paschal mystery involving Jesus' ultimate triumph over sin and death. God permits human evil to occur through secondary and free causes but God always tries to overcome evil. The powerlessness of God in the face of human evil does not mean that God is not working to overcome evil. Those who experience powerlessness in the world must also struggle to overcome their present condition. Yes, the powerless and the oppressed can relate to Jesus on the cross but they must also strive to redeem the evil structures in which they find themselves.

Third, power alone cannot be absolutized in ethical considerations. Just as power is seen as only one of the attributes of God, so too power in moral theology must be seen in connection with other virtues such as truth, goodness, justice, freedom, participation, etc. Empowerment of the poor and powerless remains a most important ethical imperative, but empowerment must be used to promote justice, truth, peace, freedom, and participation of all in the life of society. Power always needs to be guided and directed.

Human power and responsibility are above all seen in questions of technology.³³ Through science and technology, human beings have achieved a greater power over nature and even over history itself. The terrifying power and problem of nuclear energy illustrate the human dilemma. In the area of biomedical technology, human beings now exercise more power than they ever had before. Think of the fact that less than a century ago the human life expectancy was half of what it is today. About a decade ago the Council of the Society for Health and Human Values determined that the most significant and far-reaching advance produced by new biological technology was contraception.³⁴ No one can doubt that contraception has given people great power over their reproductive faculties and brought about many cultural and social changes in our sexual mores. Yet the possibilities available today in the area of human reproduction are breathtaking. *In vitro* fertilization is now commonly used by many infertile couples who want a child. Today the abortion pill is a very debated topic. Who can imagine what the topic for

³³The bibliography on technology is enormous. For a helpful annotated bibliography, see Frederick Ferré, ed., *Concepts of Nature and God: Resources for College and University Teaching* (Athens GA: University of Georgia Press, 1989).

³⁴See my *Moral Theology: A Continuing Journey* (Notre Dame IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1982) 141ff.

discussion in biomedical technology will be even in the next decade! Biomedical technology's possibilities illustrate the power and the problems that technology creates. How should we as human beings deal with technological developments? Our contemporary world in the area of technology faces the question of human power and responsibility.

Tomes have been written on technology and human responsibility. However, in this short space a basic approach or attitude to technology can be developed in the light of what has already been said about history and providence and on the basis of the stance developed earlier. As in the discussion of history two extreme positions should be avoided. The one position associated with a progressive view of history sees technology on a progressive, always developing course bringing goods and benefits to the human condition. The opposite extreme sees technology as demonic and opposed to the truly human.

In my perspective, technology is a limited human good which is somewhat ambiguous and susceptible of abuse. Technology is the fruit of human creativity which shares in divine insight and power. For this reason, technology in general is a good, but some qualifications must be immediately added. Technology is a limited human good. The human is greater than the technological. The human embraces many aspects—the psychological, the sociological, the scientific, the artistic, the hygenic, etc. In comparison with the human, the technological constitutes a narrow and partial perspective. The human must always govern and direct the technological. Sometimes the human perspective with its broad understanding must say no to technological possibilities because of their effect on other aspects involved in the human. What is technologically feasible is not always desirable. Not only is technology a limited good but it is also ambiguous. Technology is not a good without some problems. Today we are very conscious of the negative aspects of what are intrinsically a part of our sources of power. Coal, oil, and gas have enabled human beings to produce infinitely more than our ancestors, but these fuels have also polluted our environment and caused great problems. No technology is going to be without its ambiguities and negative aspects. The ambiguities of technology are highlighted in the contemporary debate over nuclear power plants. Technology as a limited and ambiguous good can also be abused by sinful human beings. The current nuclear danger reminds us of the deadly abuse of nuclear power. On balance, I would argue that contraception has been a boon for truly human existence but contraception has also been abused. Often in our patriarchal society the woman has borne the burden and the anxieties of contraception as seen for example in the pill. Science and technology have given human beings great power that was not even dreamt about some years ago. Christians should use their human power in and through technology but also must remember the limits, the ambiguities, and the abuses to which all technology is subject. No technology is simply good without any qualification and all technology can be abused by human power acting in the wrong way.

The divine and the human in history raise the question of hope as a Christian virtue. Hope might properly be called a very significant and distinctive Christian characteristic precisely because divine power is at work in history. How we understand hope is intimately connected with how we understood history and the working of the divine power in our world.

If divine power were totally identified with human power then one would have a very optimistic view of history. If divine power were totally absent from the externals of human history, then history for the Christian has meaning only as a stage for the working out of the history of salvation. Hope avoids the two opposite extremes of optimism and cynicism. Christian hope is based on the divine power which is present and can be redemptive within human history. Hope is hope precisely because one cannot see in the past or the present the possibilities of change and redemption. Hope is not an easy virtue nor a matter of prognostication based on what has occurred. Only those who suffer somewhat know truly how to hope. The opposite side of the tension of hope underscores the fact that hope will never be fulfilled in this world. Human experience in this world reminds us that all suffering in this world is not redeemed. The fulfillment of Christian hope lies beyond history, but such an understanding cannot become an excuse for passive acceptance of whatever exists in history.

Providence as affecting specific moral decisions. In the light of the Catholic tradition and some contemporary theories of providence, I would maintain that providence or the divine in human history does not take away from human responsibility, does not act as a substitute for human responsibility, and does not change the content of how Christians should act. Such a position is in accord with both the older tradition in Catholic moral theology and with the contemporary understanding of providence as denying any direct, immediate intervention of God in human history. God works in and through human responsibility and not around it. A belief in providence might supply motivation but providence should not affect the moral content of the responsible human act of the Christian.

A belief in providence definitely influences the Christian attitudes such as hope, but does not change the action which Christians are called to do. Generally speaking, even today Catholic moral theologians do not appeal to providence in discussing specific Christian decision-making. Those Catholic theologians who maintain there is only one moral order which is the same for Christians and all others would logically not appeal to providence to explain why Christians should act differently from other human beings. This section will now discuss two invocations of providence by contemporary Catholic moral theologians.

The Lay Letter on the American economy, associated with the work of Michael Novak and others, accepts a notion of providence very similar to the Thomistic concept developed in the beginning of this paper. God's providential care for this world is not that of a watchmaker. Providence means that God allows contingent forces to work in all their baffling contingency and empowers human beings to act freely. God compels no one but orders all things sweetly and from within their own proper natures and liberties. This commentary on the American economy uses such a concept of providence to justify free markets and to oppose any economic planning. The letter appeals to the providence of human beings to work out what is good. Free markets are a form of rational planning whose rationality flows from the millions of acts of concrete intelligence performed by all who participate in free markets. Thus divine providence is used to understand human providence and to argue against economic planning.³⁵ I agree with the concept of

³⁵*Toward the Future: Catholic Social Thought and the U.S. Economy: A Lay Letter* (North Tarrytown NY: Lay Commission on Catholic Social Teaching and the U.S. Economy, 1984) 76-80.

providence but not with the ethical applications made here. In accord with this understanding of providence, I believe the ethical question of structuring the economy should be determined by what is most fair, just, and responsible. Such criteria should govern the human decision about some economic planning and no recourse to an analogy with divine providence is either required or helpful.

Providence, especially understood as involving divine intervention in the world, has been used to argue against a consequentialist theory in ethics in general and specifically as opposing a so-called realistic ethic with regard to the use of force. John Howard Yoder has consistently and coherently proposed an ethic of unwavering, suffering love.³⁶ One should never use violence even to attempt to kill the attacker. Christians are called to pacifism. Over the years, others have argued that violence is necessary as a last resort to prevent even greater evils in our world. Yoder argues that there are more than the two alternatives of unmitigated tragedy and the use of violence. If I choose to kill, I do not trust God to work things out. Other possibilities are martyrdom or other alternatives occurring either from natural possibilities or from God's direct intervention. Yoder sees the justification of violence as an attempt by human beings to think they can and should control history. The appeal to providence thus serves as a good argument against consequentialism and against the opposition to pacifism. In fairness, Yoder himself realizes that one could make the case against consequentialism and in favor of pacifism by pointing out that even from the viewpoint of natural possibilities there are more than the two alternatives of violence or a tragic situation.³⁷ There is no doubt that one can hold opinions opposed to any form of consequentialism or proportionalism and not directly appeal to an interventionist understanding of providence. Many philosophical positions do so.

Contemporary Catholic moral theology also has its debate about consequentialism and questions of war and peace. The details of these discussions cannot be proposed here. Just one group of authors will be considered—Germaine Grisez, John Finnis, and Joseph Boyle, who have recently coauthored a book on nuclear deterrence.³⁸ These three thinkers are the foremost spokespersons in contemporary Catholic moral theology for a position strongly opposed to any form of proportionalism and likewise oppose changes in Catholic moral teaching often supported by more "liberal" theologians and thinkers. Their basic moral theory maintains that one cannot directly go against basic human goods such as life no matter what good one hopes to accomplish. Grisez and Finnis, who were trained as moral philosophers, have published widely and Grisez has now written the first volume of a projected four volume treatise on moral theology.³⁹ Grisez's moral

³⁶See especially John Howard Yoder, *The Politics of Jesus* (Grand Rapids MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1972) and *The Priestly Kingdom: Social Ethics as Gospel* (Notre Dame IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1984).

³⁷John Howard Yoder, "What Would You Do If . . . ?" An Exercise in Situation Ethics," *Journal of Religious Ethics* 2/2 (1974) 81-105.

³⁸John Finnis, Joseph M. Boyle, Jr., and Germain Grisez, *Nuclear Deterrence, Morality and Realism* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987).

³⁹Germain Grisez, *The Way of the Lord Jesus: Christian Moral Principles* (Chicago: Franciscan Herald Press, 1983); John Finnis, *Natural Law and Human Rights* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980).

theology not only in its specific ethical conclusions but also in its theological approaches can be called "conservative." In their discussion of nuclear deterrence and in their opposition to proportionalism, these authors also discuss providence, but they do not understand providence as Yoder does to maintain the possibility of a direct, divine intervention in history.

These three authors conclude that the deterrent strategy insofar as it involves threats of city swapping and final retaliation is immoral. Unilateral renunciation of such a deterrent is morally required. The authors then develop a casuistry, in the best sense of the term, about what the different moral agents are required to do in the light of this moral understanding. The argument throughout the book is made purely on philosophical grounds with only a final chapter giving some concluding Christian thoughts.

In this final chapter involving faith considerations, the authors recognize the need to defend their position against the charge of realism that they are naive.⁴⁰ Unilateral disarmament would surrender the West to Marxist-Leninist domination. While recognizing Christian influence in the West as well as the failures of the West, these authors are much more negative about Marxist-Leninism. However, Grisez, *et al.* cannot accept the argument that one can do moral evil in order to accomplish good. Moral evil can never be done no matter what the good that might justify it. Moral evil is the greatest evil in the world. We can never do or intend moral evil.

In this context, one could expect an appeal to divine providence on the part of those who would hold to a direct, divine intervention in history. But these three authors do not make such an appeal. One has to face up to the possibility and ultimately perhaps live with the reality of Marxist-Leninist domination. One cannot use the need to avoid such domination as a justifying reason to do moral evil. These Catholic authors do not reason to their position primarily from the danger of a nuclear holocaust, but such a holocaust again does not have to be avoided at all cost and by whatever means. Our world as we know it is going to end sometime and God will bring forth the new heaven and the new earth. We believe that the death of this physical universe will not be the end, just as we believe that the death of the individual human person will not be the end. We Christians look for the resurrection and everlasting life. The argument from realism demands that we corrupt ourselves by being willing to do moral evil. Finnis, Boyle, and Grisez recognize the charge that their positions can be accused of moral purism and an attempt to keep one's own hands clean, but they defend their position because of its philosophical truth.

These authors do appeal to the Christian doctrine of providence that God permits evil in order to bring greater good out of it. However, no appeal is made to a direct, divine intervention which might prevent future domination by Marxist-Leninist forces or which might prevent a nuclear catastrophic destruction of the world. In what might seem to be a surprising new move, the authors appeal to providence as another refutation of consequentialist or proportionalist reasoning in Christian ethics. Such consequentialist approaches confuse human responsibility with God's responsibility. Human beings are not responsible for the overall

⁴⁰Finnis, Boyle, and Grisez, *Nuclear Deterrence*, 367-90.

greater good or lesser evil, for only God knows what they are. Human beings simply carry out the part of God's plan that God assigns to each of them as his or her own personal responsibility. Proportionalists assume for the human being the type of providence that only God can have.⁴¹

I disagree with the theory proposed by Grisez *et al.* and with the appeal to providence to support their theory. However, for our present purposes, one should note the restricted use made of providence by these authors. They do not understand providence as entailing a direct, immediate intervention of God in history. Their use of providence differs from Yoder's use. Also, Grisez *et al.* do not use providence to change or alter human responsibility in this world. Their theory rests primarily on philosophical grounds. The theological argument from providence merely gives further support to what has already been proposed in the name of human reason. Thus their use of providence still seems to be in accord with the basic thesis of this paper that providence does not change, alter, or lessen human responsibility in this world.

Christians believe in the mystery of divine providence, but such a mystery will always need further attempts to comprehend somewhat more adequately its meaning without anyone ever totally understanding it. The Catholic tradition of moral theology has insisted on human responsibility and did not see providence as altering, changing, or attenuating human responsibility for human actions. Such an approach is quite open to accepting a noninterventionist view of providence on the contemporary scene. Moral theology will continue to deal with the mystery of providence and with the specific questions of history and power. God and God's grace are present in our world and in our history, but God acts in and through the human. The major thesis of this paper is that the Catholic tradition in moral theology in the past and also today does not and should not appeal to divine providence in any way to change, alter, or attenuate human responsibility and actions in this world.

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⁴¹Ibid., 378-84. The same argument is proposed by Grisez, *The Way of the Lord Jesus*, 151. In his book, Grisez deals with providence on a number of occasions but does not appeal to a direct, divine intervention in history.