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God's Concurrence in Human Action

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IN presenting the doctrine of divine providence, the teachers of the Christian Church usually stress, in the first place, God's actual conservation of all created things, by which His creatures persist both in their being and their operation (*in esse suo ac vi operandi*). Should their categories at times appear as rather scholastic or academic, it is well to remember that they were endeavoring to clarify and preserve intact in its purity the somewhat mysterious Scripture doctrine of God's actual participation in creatural action against the two fundamental fallacies of erring human reason: fatalism and atheism.

GOD'S CONCURRENCE IN EVIL ACTION

Groping human reason, in scrutinizing God's co-operation in human action, either makes Him the direct and responsible cause of all action, both evil and good, or, realizing that evil and good are antitheses, or mutually exclusive concepts, it precludes Him from every action that is evil. There are of course modifications of each of these two diametrically opposed views, but beyond these general categories human reason, in its limitation of time and space and blinded by sinful prejudice, cannot go; the non-Christian philosopher is bound to be either a Stoic or an Epicurean, a determinist or a casualist, a pantheist or a materialist. According to unenlightened human speculation, either God is the cause of evil, or evil is non-existent or, at any rate, merely a matter of chance, with which God has nothing to do. Of the two speculative theories, fatalism at St. Paul's time was sponsored chiefly by what might be called the philosophical intelligentsia of paganism, while materialistic atheism as a philosophy of superficial ratiocination was espoused in the main by the masses that used it largely for the destruction of their moral self, or the suppression of the voice of conscience, as they addicted themselves to the carnal pleasures of sex, gluttony, and drunkenness. They argued: Since there is no Divine Being and all is chance,

sensual enjoyment as an end of life is fully justified. Fatalism, on the other hand, while maintaining the certainty of divine operation, denied the freedom of human self-determination and so substituted for providence an inexorable fate against which there was neither cure nor comfort for man in his distress of life and death. Both systems of thought were as hopeless as they were godless.

To St. Paul, fatalism appeared in its most common and popular development as Zenoism, or Stoicism. Philosophers like Cicero and Seneca saw in the impelling power of divine fate the redeeming virtue of sane and clean living, in which they recognized the only salvation of the decadent, perishing Roman empire. The masses and mercenary sophists, on the other hand, favored Epicurianism, which held out to them the enjoyment of the sensual with utter oblivion of the moral. In view of the atheistic principle of Epicurean thought that matter, and so man, utterly perishes in death, the Apostle, in his great treatise on the resurrection of the flesh, attributes to Epicurean hedonism a certain justification: "If after the manner of men I have fought with beasts at Ephesus, what advantageth it me if the dead rise not? Let us eat and drink; for tomorrow we die." (1 Cor. 15:32.) However, in view of the certainty of the resurrection, and that of course means of God's remunerative and punitive providence and man's moral responsibility, St. Paul rules out the philosophy of atheistic materialism and demands the separateness of all Christians from unbelieving casualists: "Be not deceived; evil communications corrupt good manners. Awake to righteousness, and sin not; for some have not the knowledge of God. I speak this to your shame." (1 Cor. 15:32-33.)

Today the deterministic pantheist with his fatalistic deductions is still with us, though atheistic materialism, in a more or less gross form, is the popular philosophy of the majority of modern pagan men. Deistic mechanism, which separates the world from God and makes it function according to certain laws of necessity, is atheistic in its final deductions though theoretically it asserts God's existence and creation. So also the doctrine of casualism is fundamentally atheistic, for while casualists indeed recognize God's existence in theory, they, by attributing human events to non-divine causes, exchange divine providence for chance and so in reality deny God. In the view of some, providence pertains only to the great world

events, and not to the trivial occurrences in life, and so they teach what might be called the atheism of man's ordinary life. Occasionalism, which recognizes only a divine occasion that starts off creatural activity, must likewise be classified as fundamentally atheistic. Thus the world in its speculative thinking on the interrelation between divine operation and creatural activity has not advanced one iota beyond the philosophy that confronted the great Apostle, as he made known to the cynically Stoical and the equally cynically atheistic world of his day the Christian *kerygma* of God's intervention in human affairs, especially through the redemptive work of His Son Jesus Christ, our Lord. With his supernatural Gospel message of salvation, which presupposes divine providence, St. Paul therefore is still the teacher and guide of the Christian Church as it opposes pagan fatalism and pagan atheism alike by the threefold doctrine of divine conservation, divine concurrence, and divine government, which form the three parts of divine providence as taught in Christian dogmatics.

St. Paul did not teach the doctrine of divine providence in its later systematic form, but from a very practical, homiletic point of view, in order that he might preach salvation to a generation for whom salvation had no spiritual meaning. His common theme was: God, the Creator, the Preserver, the Savior, the Judge of man. To the Athenian philosophers that was a rather startling message. St. Luke graphically depicts the encounter of the great Apostle with the philosophers of Athens. St. Paul had come to "the most distinguished city in Greece, the seat of literature, philosophy, and the fine arts," after he had completed a most successful mission in Macedonia. But persecution by the Jews moved the brethren to send him away "to go, as it were, to the sea" (Acts 17:14). Silas and Timothy, the Apostle's helpers, "abode there still," to finish the work which had been begun so gloriously. At Athens St. Paul decided to await the arrival of the brethren before starting on his Gospel mission. But "his spirit was stirred in him when he saw the city wholly given to idolatry" (v. 16), and so he began to witness Christ both in the synagog and in the market daily "with them that met him." In this way the Apostle met the philosophers. "Then certain philosophers of the Epicureans and of the Stoics encountered him. And some said, What will this babbler say? Other some, He

seemeth to be a setter forth of strange gods; because he preached unto them Jesus and the resurrection. And they took him and brought him unto Areopagus, saying: May we know what the new doctrine, whereof thou speakest, is? For thou bringest certain strange things to our ears; we would know therefore what these things mean." (Vv. 17-20.) It is interesting here to observe St. Luke's explanatory note: "For all the Athenians and strangers which were there, spent their time in nothing else but either to tell or to hear some new thing" (v. 21).

Such, then, was the challenge which came to St. Paul as he stood on the Athenian Mars Hill, a rocky height in Athens, opposite the western end of the Acropolis, where the highest Athenian court was held and where, in addition, philosophers of all sorts, with all the privileges of an ancient "Hyde Park," expounded their various speculative theories, in which, however, there seems to have been little that was new until St. Paul came with his revealed *kerygma.* Of all the sermons of St. Paul recorded by St. Luke, the one delivered in Athens is by far the most intriguing from the viewpoint of the Christian apologist defending divine providence. Just how much of the discourse St. Luke reports, or how completely he gives the outline of the address, we do not know. Evidently the narrator quotes only the salient thoughts of the Christian *kerygma* here proclaimed. No doubt, St. Paul said much more on repentance and faith than is recorded in Acts, for though he was rudely dismissed when he began to discuss his doctrine of the final Resurrection and Judgment, there is reason to assume that he had given the Athenian philosophers, who were used to long philosophical disquisitions, a pretty good insight into the Christian message of Law and Gospel, sin and grace, repentance and remission of sins, for after all his testimony at Athens was not in vain. "Certain men clave to him and believed; among the which was Dionysius, the Areopagite, and a woman named Damaris, and others with them" (v. 34). But what interests us here, in particular, are the three elements of the doctrine of divine providence: *conservatio, concursus, gubernatio,* which St. Paul unfolded before his critical, cynical audience of pagan philosophers, who represented the philosophies both of fatalism and atheism.

As we analyze the Apostle's discourse, we find that the three

elements of divine providence stand out in clear relief. He appears in Athens with a definite message of God, who in the creation of the world and all things therein has revealed Himself as the Lord of heaven and earth. This personal God, the Creator of all men, who to the Apostle was no *Deus ignotus,* is also the Preserver of the created universe. "He giveth to all life and breath and all things" (v. 25). This personal God, moreover, concurs in all actions of men, good and evil, for "in Him we live and move and have our being" (v. 28). Finally this personal God also rules and governs all things, even the evil, for "the times of this ignorance [of pagan idolatry] God winked at, but now commandeth all men everywhere to repent" (v. 30). Pagan idolatry therefore did not take place without God's knowledge or dispensation, but by His permission; for when St. Paul argues that God "winked at [ὑπεριδών, overlooked] the times of this ignorance," he means no more and no less than what he otherwise describes as "God gave them up to" (παρέδωκεν, Rom. 1:24, 26). He thus recognizes God's permissive providence in His dealing with men of wicked disposition and evil action, by which, in His punitive judgment, He suffers them to commit the vilest abominations as a punishment for their sins (cf. *New Testament with Notes, sub* Rom. 1:24, p. 390).

The Apostle, in presenting the doctrine, does not employ the scholastic terms which Christian dogmaticians here use with such telling effect, but he nevertheless teaches every essential point of the Christian doctrine of divine providence. God certainly permits evil to take place, but He is not the Author or Abettor of the evil which He permits in His righteous judgment upon the ungodly. "For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who hold the truth in unrighteousness" (lit., "who suppress the truth by means of unrighteousness," Rom. 1:18). Nor does God exculpate the sinners on the ground that they did not know Him and His will. At Corinth, with all the malicious wickedness of the perverse pagan world in view, St. Paul writes to the Romans: "Because that which may be known of God [lit., "the knowable things of God"] is manifest in them; for God hath showed it unto them . . . so that they are without excuse" (vv. 19-20). The heathen indeed committed idolatry, but that was not God's fault, but their own: "Professing themselves

to be wise, they became fools" (v. 22). Such is the Apostle's severe condemnation of perverse man on account of his willful wickedness. By an act of His *iustitia punitiva* the holy and righteous God suffers the wicked to sin; but when He so concurs in evil action, He is responsible only for the act as such and not for the act in so far as it is evil; in other words, God works only the effect, not the defect; or, to put it in the terminology of our dogmaticians, in so far as it is a part of His sustaining providence (*quoad materiale*), and not in so far as it is a part of wicked man's transgression (*quoad formale*). St. Paul, as said before, does not use these technical terms, but he provides the guidelines for these rather nice distinctions. God certainly permits the evil to take place, but He forbids and punishes it: "Tribulation and anguish upon every soul of man that doeth evil, of the Jews first and also of the Gentile" (Rom. 2:9). The divine principle that obtains, reads: "Who will render to every man according to his deeds" (Rom. 2:6).

St. Paul, however, teaches not only that God forbids and punishes evil, but also that in His overruling providence He causes the evil to redound to the good of His elect: "All things work together for good to them that love God" (Rom. 8:28). This comforting truth the Apostle applies very strikingly with respect to his own sufferings, especially in his Second Letter to the Corinthians: "As the sufferings of Christ abound in us, so our consolation also aboundeth by Christ. And whether we be afflicted, it is for your consolation and salvation, which is effectual in the enduring of the same sufferings which we also suffer" (2 Cor. 1:5-6).

St. Paul asserted the doctrine of divine providence, in particular, of God's permissive and dispensing providence, with great clarity and force also in his discourse at Lystra, where he had healed a lame man and where, in consequence, the pagan priests, regarding Barnabas as Jupiter and his more eloquent companion as Mercury, desired to do them divine homage. In deprecating this gross idolatry, St. Paul earnestly affirms God's permissive providence: "Who in times past suffered all nations to walk in their own ways" (Acts 14:16); and His preserving, dispensing, or governing providence: "He left not Himself without witness in that He did good and gave us rain from heaven and fruitful seasons, filling our hearts with food and gladness" (v. 17). In other words, the divine

Creator is also the divine Preserver, to whose grace and power men owe everything that is good, no matter whether they are saints or sinners. God's governmental providence here is even more clearly expressed than in the Apostle's Mars Hill address: "And hath made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth and hath determined the times before appointed and the bounds of their habitation" (Acts 17:26). Thus the doctrine of God's providential ruling appears as a weighty Pauline teaching.

One wonders whether St. Paul, when proclaiming to the heathen the doctrine of divine providence in its threefold aspect, was understood. At Lystra St. Paul with Barnabas "scarce restrained the people with these sayings that they had not done sacrifice unto them" (Acts 14:18); nevertheless the Apostle's discourses at Lystra and Athens seemed to have appealed to the heathen hearers as being divinely true on the basis of the divine Law inscribed in man's heart at Creation.

Dr. Augustus Strong, in his *Systematic Theology* (Vol. I, p. 419 ff.), quotes the philosophers of that era both as negating and asserting divine providence. Cicero thus says that while the gods care for the big things, they ignore the little matters. He cites also Plutarch (d. ca. A. D. 120) as asserting that divine providence could not create an infinity of worlds, since it could not take care of so many (I, p. 429). These are expressions of pagan providential faith mingled with skepticism. But in *De Natura Deorum* (11, 30) Cicero argues (through Balbus, the speaker) that the gods exist and that if this is conceded, it must be acknowledged that through their council the world is governed. Epictetus (Sec. 41) lays down the rule that the chief and most important duty in religion is to possess one's mind with just and becoming notions of the gods, to believe that such supreme beings exist, and that they govern and dispose of all the affairs of the world with a just providence. In a similar manner Marcus Antoninus remarks: "But gods there are, and they have a regard for human affairs" (I, p. 425). Of such expressions there are very many in both the Greek and the Roman writings. Concerning these the reader will find a large number also in the Luthardt-Jelke *Kompendium der Dogmatik* (15th ed., (p. 212 f.). Cicero there is quoted as saying (*De Nat. Deor.* I,

20, 52) that divine providence occupies itself especially with supplying what is most needed to uphold the world, with never letting it suffer want, and with adorning it with the most exquisite beauty. But Cicero also recognizes fate side by side with divine providence, and he regards it as unworthy of the gods to be concerned about life's trivialities (cf. *De Nat. Deor.* 1, c. II, 66, 167; c. III, 35, 86). St. Paul, therefore, when expounding to his pagan audiences the facts of divine providence, could expect them to understand at least the fundamentals of the doctrine and to receive sympathetically what he said in addition to their meager knowledge on this point.

It is certain, however, that the pagan thinkers did not derive from the doctrine of divine providence the sweet, consoling comfort which Paul consistently derived from the revealed doctrine in his private and official suffering. The Apostle's blessed ministry was, as every Bible student knows, one of extraordinary suffering, as God Himself had predicted this when He called him into the Apostolic office: "He is a chosen vessel unto Me to bear My name before the Gentiles and kings and the children of Israel, for I will show him how great things he must suffer for My name's sake" (Acts 9: 15-16). This prophecy was fulfilled to the letter. The Church of the Gentiles was built by the toil, sweat, and tears of the great Apostle. His descriptions of his sufferings culminate in two passages, one in 1 Cor. 4:9-13, and the other in 2 Corinthians 11 and 12. The first is relatively brief, but the compactness and comprehensiveness of descriptive detail renders this passage most impressive, especially the climax: "We are made as the filth of the world and are the offscouring of all things unto this day" (1 Cor. 4:13). In the second and very long description of the Apostle's continued affliction there is stress also on the inwardness of his suffering, his agony of soul, which moves him to ask God thrice to remove the buffeting messenger of Satan, the thorn in the flesh. But here is mentioned also his acquiescence in God's dispensing providence when divine love assured him that His strength is made perfect in His servant's weakness (2 Cor. 12:9). A remarkable passage indeed, and one that is unique in extant literature, for while Epicurean writings at times voice the dreadful despair of a soul afflicted beyond endurance, and Stoic literature hurls challenges of defiance to the fate that afflicts the human soul so grievously, there

is comfort only in St. Paul's description of his suffering. Epicureans and Stoics know only of one way out — self-extinction! The great Apostle sees in his unspeakable suffering a service of Christ, which ultimately redounds to God's glory and the good of His Church: "Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities that the power of Christ may rest upon me . . . for when I am weak, then I am strong" (2 Cor. 12:9-10).

In the same way, the Apostle used the important truth of divine providence, in particular of divine concurrence in the evil actions of creatures, to the comfort of his readers: "God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able, but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it" (1 Cor. 10:13). But the most consoling passage regarding the cross of Christian believers is the one with which he closes his famous eighth chapter of Romans, where he triumphantly states that in all tribulation, distress, persecution, famine, nakedness, peril, sword, or whatever evil there may be, they are more than conquerors through Christ and that "neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus, our Lord" (Rom. 8:35-39). Because of the great disciplinary value of the cross, imposed upon God's children by divine love, he urges Timothy not to be ashamed of the testimony of our Lord, nor of him as His prisoner, but to be a partaker of the afflictions of the Gospel according to the power of God (2 Tim. 1:8); for, he adds: "If we suffer, we shall also reign with Him" (2 Tim. 2:12). We cannot exhaust this important subject in our article. But we must mention a few more salient points of the Apostle's gladdening teaching concerning divine providence which preserves, concurs in, and governs the evil which by the heavenly Father's gracious dispensation comes to His saints on earth, in order that He might glorify His name through them. St. Paul writes: "All things are for your sakes, that the abundant grace might through the thanksgiving of many redound to the glory of God. For which cause we faint not, but though our outward man perish, yet the inward man is renewed day by day. For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a

far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory, while we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen; for the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal." (2 Cor. 5:15 ff.) Divine words indeed! While the Epicurean despaired in his tribulation and the Stoic defied the deity that plagued him, St. Paul blessed the gracious hand that chastised him in love; for in his suffering, great though it was, he beheld the upholding, guiding, glorifying providence of the merciful God who in Christ Jesus was leading him *per aspera ad astra.*

Just because St. Paul believed in the beneficent purposes of divine providence, he was given to constant, devout, triumphant prayer. The Stoic could not pray, and the Epicurean would not pray, but for St. Paul prayer was a *causa sine qua non* of Christian living. He prayed always with thanksgiving to God for His manifold blessings; so also he urged his readers to "pray without ceasing" (1 Thess. 5:17). How divinely triumphant was St. Paul's prayer life! "I thank my God upon every remembrance of you, always in every prayer of mine for you all making request with joy" (Phil. 1:3-4). So he addresses the believers at Philippi. To the Christians at Ephesus he writes: "Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints" (Eph. 6:18). He beseeches the Thessalonians: "Brethren, pray for us" (1 Thess. 5:25). Absolutely certain that God's providential care would overrule all things for good, he asks his fellow believers to give "thanks always for all things unto God and the Father, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ" (Eph. 5:20).

St. Paul's life thus was wondrously joyous, despite its severe afflictions, and also strangely happy. He always found something for which to praise God: for the faith of the Christians at Rome, which was voiced throughout the world (Rom. 1:8); for the abundant divine grace given to the Corinthians (1 Cor. 1:4); for the constant victory that was given him in Christ (2 Cor. 2:14); for the unceasing strength which he received from the Lord (1 Tim. 1:12); even for the infirmities which he endured in Christ (2 Cor. 12:9). St. Paul's prayer and thanksgiving life proves that in him the power of Christ was mighty to conquer

all adversities and that His Word was not taught of man's wisdom, but given to him by the Holy Ghost (1 Cor. 2:13). Neither for his message nor for his holy, grateful, consecrated life is there any parallel in pagan literature or history.

God's Concurrence in Good Action

This article would not be complete, would it not contain at least a brief note on God's concurrence in the good actions of men. St. Paul's teaching on divine concurrence in the evil actions of creatures is, as we saw, full of comfort for the Christian believer, since all evil actions must work together for good to those who put their trust in the Lord. But much more comforting still is the Apostle's teaching on God's concurrence in the good actions of men.

The subject demands that first of all the good actions of men be considered which are done by persons in His Kingdom of Power, or in human society in general, including pagan human society which does not have the revealed, or Biblical, religion for its source or guide. It is St. Paul's teaching that not a single good work is performed by mankind without divine instigation and operation. If, according to his teaching, all men live and move and have their being in God (Acts 17:28), then also their good works have their source in divine concurrence. For our right evaluation of the works of unconverted men and for our effective proclamation of the Christian *kerygma* to non-Christians, at home and abroad, this teaching certainly is of the greatest importance. While the so-called "externally" good works of the unregenerate cannot save them, as works save no one, neither in the Christian Church nor without, we must recognize God's preserving, co-operating, and ruling providence also in the good works done by men in His *regno potentiae* and in this area call them good. We must therefore speak of a *iustitia civilis* of non-Christians, or of good works *in externis,* such as parental love, patriotism, kindness, neighborliness, and the like. From the viewpoint of Christ's *regnum gratiae* such works of course are not good, for St. Augustine's dictum that even the best works of the heathen are but glittering vices is certainly true. The good works of the heathen are not spiritually good, that is to say, they do not flow from true love of God, since

they do not have their origin in faith in Christ, but they are good inasmuch as the Lord works them to His glory.

The doctrine that God is operative also in the non-Christian world through the Law inscribed in the human heart, permitting evil and working good, as His divine providence governs all things to His glory and the good of His elect, comforts us in our modern welter of confusion and seeming lawlessness, even as it comforted St. Paul in his own troubled time. We cannot always see the ruling and overruling divine hand which directs all things to His glory and the good of His Church, but we should always be sure of His gracious designs and of His own good and firm guidance of all mundane affairs. When St. Paul made the solemn plea before Festus: "I appeal to Caesar," and Festus, having conferred with the council, replied: "Hast thou appealed unto Caesar? Unto Caesar shalt thou go" (Acts 25:11-12), there was most assuredly in this decision of the Roman court the preserving, concurring overruling divine providence, which so directed the Apostle's future life that he converted souls that he otherwise, according to our human view, would not have converted and that he composed letters which, humanly speaking, he would not have written otherwise. From this viewpoint we must judge also St. Paul's other imprisonments. The ardent Apostle of the Gentiles was eager to preach the Gospel to the Gentiles everywhere; instead, he was led to spend considerable time of his life in seclusion and captivity. He could not see God's purpose in this enforced inactivity then; but we can, at least in part, see it today as we look back upon his blessed life and successful work. So also we shall behold in heaven the perfect picture of our own life and work which now often seems so obscure to us, and even bizarre and wrong, as "God moves in mysterious ways His wonders to perform." When Felix, to please the Jews, had left St. Paul in prison (Acts 24:27), the Lord appeared to him and said: "Be of good cheer, Paul; for as thou hast testified of Me in Jerusalem, so must thou bear witness also at Rome" (Acts 23:11). Now God directed the heart of Festus in such a way that the divine purposes were fulfilled. There is therefore law and order in the apparent *tohu vabohu* of our present-day world situation as also in the perplexities and disorders of our own lives. Only, as we do not yet walk by sight, we must

walk by faith and in the strength of the Holy Spirit hold to God's gracious promises concerning His just and merciful providence.

There is little need for us to dwell at greater length on the work of divine providence in Christ's Kingdom of Grace, as this subject has been treated so often and thoroughly. But a few notes may be appended on this certainly most weighty matter. While in His *regno potentiae* God works good works through His divine Law implanted in the human heart, the Law serving as a curb, mirror, and rule, Christ's *regnum gratiae* is properly the sphere where the Lord works His wonders of goodness and love through the Gospel, as His power unto salvation (Rom. 1:16). Those who study St. Paul's Letters without prejudice cannot fail to see how consistently and forcibly the Apostle ascribes every good thought, desire, word, and deed in the Church to the divinely revealed Gospel as God's ordained means of grace by which He preserves and governs His saints. Faith cometh by hearing the Word of God (Rom. 10:17), and the Word of God here means the "Gospel of peace," the "glad tidings of good things" (v. 15). When St. Paul pleads with believers to present their bodies a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable unto God, he does so by an appeal to the "mercies of God," that is, to the Gospel *kerygma* (Rom. 12:1). In all his Letters St. Paul magnifies Christ, and in particular the Christ in the Gospel, as the sole Source and Agent of all that is good, and that is why, too, he recognizes no other *kerygma* than "Jesus Christ, and Him Crucified" (1 Cor. 2:2). To him Christ is everything: "Wisdom, and Righteousness, and Sanctification, and Redemption" (1 Cor. 1:30). By the risen, living, ruling Christ, the Apostle appeals to the Corinthians to be steadfast, unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, assured that their labor is not in vain in the Lord (1 Cor. 15:58). All glory be to Christ; all efficacy, to His powerful Gospel. Such was St. Paul's guiding principle in his heroic ministry. His entire Apostolic mission was centered in Christ and His blessed Gospel. Through the Gospel he begat the Corinthian believers to be children of God and heirs of eternal life (1 Cor. 4:15). All things he does for the Gospel's sake that he may become a partaker thereof with those whom he gains by its proclamation (1 Cor. 9:23). So great is his reverence for the Gospel that he, in the name of the Lord, anathematizes all who

preach any other Gospel (Gal. 1:8). For the Gospel's sake he does not regret his bonds in Christ, but thanks God that the things which happened fell out unto the furtherance of the divine *kerygma* (Phil. 1:12). By the Gospel of Christ, which he proclaimed, God's elect in Thessalonica were called "to the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ" (2 Thess. 2:13-14). These are but a few passages showing how greatly St. Paul glorified the Gospel as the divinely ordained means by which the Holy Ghost calls, converts, sanctifies, and keeps in faith unto everlasting life God's elect saints. All that may be said on this point is summed up in the Apostle's triumphant words: "I am not ashamed of the Gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God unto salvation to everyone that believeth, to the Jew first, and also to the Greek. For therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith, as it is written, The just shall live by faith" (Rom. 1:16-17).

Such, then, is St. Paul's glorious doctrine of divine providence. But there is still another thought to remember: the Lord who preserves, co-operates in, and rules all things is the same Christ Jesus whom God has set "at His own right hand in the heavenly places, far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come; and hath put all things under His feet, and gave Him to be the Head over all things to the Church, which is His body, the fullness of Him that filleth all in all" (Eph. 1:20 ff.). What precious comfort there lies in this Gospel truth for us today who minister as ambassadors of Christ in the final period of the world's existence, in order that the last elect may be gathered in, thereby helping to fulfill our Lord's prophecy: "This Gospel of the Kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations; and then shall the end come."

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