

Miloš Lichner (Ed.)

# HOPE



**WHERE DOES OUR HOPE LIE?**

International Congress of the European Society for  
Catholic Theology (August 2019 - Bratislava, Slovakia)

LIT

# Theology East – West

European Perspectives

# Theologie Ost – West

Europäische Perspektiven

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# PREDESTINATION AND HOPE IN AQUINAS'S EXEGESIS OF ST. PAUL'S LETTERS

*Catalina Vial de Amesti*

When we speak about predestination, many people understand it to consist in God choosing to save some and condemn others arbitrarily and unilaterally. Predestination, understood in this way, gives a tone of hopelessness to human history, because it excludes any possibility of initiative, personal contribution or change in relation to one's own destiny. In short, it brings us to the conclusion that man's freedom does not exist and that God is not entirely good when he determines that some are condemned and others are saved.

There is no doubt that predestination is a difficult concept to understand and that it will always be enclosed by a certain halo of mystery. However, since it is part of the salvific announcement proclaimed by Paul in his Letters,<sup>1</sup> it is a real reason for hope, and we must discover its meaning.<sup>2</sup>

In this paper I do not intend to focus directly on the letters of St. Paul, but on the exegesis of Thomas Aquinas to the Apostle's Letters.<sup>3</sup> Aquinas discusses the issue of predestination at different places in his Pauline comments. In his exegesis to Romans and Ephesians he does it with more depth and extension. In this paper, I will first explain the concept of predestination as contained in the Pauline exegesis of the Do-

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<sup>1</sup> "Paul uses the verb *proorizō* five times with the basic meaning of 'determine beforehand' or 'pre-determine' (Rom 8,29.30; 1 Cor 2,7; Eph 1,5). It is not found in the LXX, and in secular Greek it is rare (if existent) before the Common Era" (W.A. ELWELL, *Election and Predestination* in G.F. HAWTHORNE; R.P. MARTIN; D.G. REID, (Eds.), *Dictionary of Paul and his Letters*, InterVarsity Press, Downers Grove 1993, 225-229, 225).

<sup>2</sup> Cf. *προορίζω* in H. BALZ; G. SCHNEIDER (Eds.), *Diccionario Exegético del Nuevo Testamento*, Ediciones Sígueme, Salamanca 1996 (Or: *Exegetisches Wörterbuch zum Neuen Testament I y II*, W. Kohlhammer GmbH, Stuttgart 1992<sup>2</sup>), 1154-1155 and K.L. SCHMIDT; *προορίζω* in G. FRIEDRICH; G. KITTEL, E. ALTRI, *Grande Lessico del Nuovo Testamento*, Paideia, Brescia 1965-1992, 16 vols. (Or: *Theologisches Wörterbuch zum Neuen Testament*, W. W. Kohlhammer verlag, Stuttgart 1933 e 1935), VIII, 1278-1280. As Elwell says: "the closely related ideas of election and predestination are crucial elements in the theological structure of Paul's thinking. If he nowhere develops them as themes, nor even frequently uses the words, that was because they were part of the very fabric of his thinking (...). In Paul these terms are used primarily as redemptive ideas, but there is evidence that they intended beyond that" (ELWELL, *Election*, 225).

<sup>3</sup> About the "mystery" of predestination in thomistic thought, cf. M. LEVERING, *Predestination: Biblical and Theological Paths*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2011, 75-83; S. LONG; R. NUTT; T.J. WHITE (Edd.), *Thomism & Predestination*, Sapientia Press, Ave Maria FL 2016; M. PALUCH, *La profondeur de l'amour divin: évolution de la doctrine de la prédestination dans l'oeuvre de saint Thomas d'Aquin*, Vrin, Paris 2004.

minican doctor, then the relationship between the divine will and human freedom. After that, I will focus on Christ as the first who is predestined and the reason for our hope. Finally, I will talk about the predestination of all men in Christ.

## 1. The Concept of Predestination

The word predestination, according to Aquinas, means: “destined beforehand”. And destination signifies: to send someone to “achieve some purpose” or “to determine beforehand in the heart what is to be done in regard to something”.<sup>4</sup> Therefore, predestination implies an ordering to an end that can be obtained by its own activity.<sup>5</sup> It is a fore existence in mind of what is to be done.<sup>6</sup>

Predestination is the eternal divine disposition of what is realized in time through grace.<sup>7</sup> According to the exegesis of St. Thomas, it is possible to distinguish a twofold cause of human salvation, both coming from God. One is eternal: predestination, and the other is temporal: sanctifying grace.<sup>8</sup> Predestination, in the words of St. Augustine,<sup>9</sup> quoted by Aquinas, is God’s “resolve to be merciful”.<sup>10</sup> It is the divine will that leads the rational creature to everlasting life.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>4</sup> Cf. *Ad Rom.*, 1, 3, n. 43: “circa primum considerandum est quod nomen praedestinationis a destinatione sumitur. Dicitur enim praedestinatus quasi ante destinatus. Destinatio autem dupliciter sumitur. Quandoque pro missione: dicuntur enim destinati qui ad aliquid mittuntur (...). Quandoque vero destinare idem est quod proponere (...). Haec autem secunda significatio a prima derivari videtur. Sicut enim nuntius, qui mittitur, ad aliquid dirigitur, ita, quod proponimus, ad finem aliquem ordinamus. Secundum hoc igitur praedestinare nihil aliud est quam ante in corde disporre quid sit de re aliqua faciendum”.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. *Ad Rom.*, 1, 3, n. 51: “cum enim praedestinatio importet ordinem in finem, eius est praedestinari cuius est per suam operationem ordinari in finem”.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. *ST I*, q. 23, a. 1, c.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. *ST III*, q. 24, a. 1, c.

<sup>8</sup> Cf. *II Ad Tim.*, 1, 3, n. 21: “est autem duplex causa humanae salutis, quae est a Deo. Una est aeterna, scilicet eius praedestinatio; alia est temporalis, scilicet gratia iustificans”. According to *ST I*, q. 23, a. 2, ad. 4, predestination is not temporal and is related to grace as the cause with the effect or the action with the objective.

<sup>9</sup> SAINT AGUSTIN, *De diversis quaestionibus ad Simplicianum*, 1, 2, 6 (PL 40, 115). St. Augustine’s most famous definition of predestination is in *De dono perseverantiae Liber unus*, 14, 35 (PL 45, 1014): “this is the predestination of the saints, nothing else; to wit, the foreknowledge and the preparation of God’s kindnesses, whereby they are most certainly delivered, whoever they are that are delivered”.

<sup>10</sup> *Ad Rom.*, 8, 6, n. 700: “praedestinationem, quae, secundum Augustinum, est propositum miserendi”. In *ST I*, q. 23, a. 2, c., St. Thomas clarifies that predestination is not something in the predestined, this would be the sanctifying grace, it is only in the one who predestines.

<sup>11</sup> Cf. C. BERMÚDEZ, *Predestinazione, grazia e libertà nei Commenti di san Tommaso alle lettere di san Paolo*, “Annales Theologici” 4 (1990), 399–421, 399.

Predestination refers only to the salvation of spiritual creatures, while Divine Providence includes all creation as it is directed to its end.<sup>12</sup> Merely natural realities are not the object of predestination. For instance, Aquinas observes, we do not say that a man is predestined to have hands because having hands is part of his constitution as a man.<sup>13</sup> The word predestination is used to mean something for which human nature is ordered, but at the same time it exceeds its nature, that is eternal life.<sup>14</sup>

In short, predestination, referring to divine action, belongs to eternity and consists of a previous disposition of those things that God wants to fulfil in time.<sup>15</sup> It is different from foreknowledge, which consists only in having knowledge of future events; predestination means being the cause of them. In this sense, foreknowledge includes sins, while predestination refers only to benefits. It is eternal because God has always been the cause of the salvific goods that he gives to the saints.<sup>16</sup>

The concept of divine predestination contains two fundamental elements: on one hand, the absolute gratuitousness and freedom through which God acts in predestining man, and on the other, God's profound respect for human freedom.

## 2. God's Will

In the Letter to the Ephesians, St. Paul says that we are: "predestined according to the purpose of him who accomplishes all things according to his counsel and will" (Eph 1:11). Aquinas explains that the only reason for predestination is God's freedom: "the cause of divine predestination is not a necessity on God's part, nor a debt to those who are predestined".<sup>17</sup> This divine will is deliberate; it proceeds from

<sup>12</sup> Cf. J. REVUELTA, *Ley Eterna y Providencia en los comentarios bíblicos de Santo Tomás de Aquino*, "Excerpta e dissertationibus in Sacra Theologia" 2 (1979), 3-59.

<sup>13</sup> Cf. *Ad Rom.*, 1, 3, n. 45: "sed quia omnia naturalia pertinent ad constitutionem rei ipsius, quia vel sunt principia ex quibus res constituitur, vel ex huiusmodi principiis consequuntur, consequens est quod naturalia proprie sub praedestinatione non cadant; sicut non dicimus proprie quod homo est praedestinatus habere manus".

<sup>14</sup> *Ad Rom.*, 1, 3, n. 45: "relinquitur ergo quod praedestinatio dicatur proprie eorum solum quae sunt supra naturam, in quae rationalis creatura ordinatur".

<sup>15</sup> Cf. *Ad Rom.*, 8, 6, n. 702: "praedestinatio importat praeordinationem quamdam in animo eorum quae quis est factururus". In this sense, cf. *ST* III, q. 24, a. 1, c.

<sup>16</sup> Cf. *Ad Rom.*, 8, 6, n. 702: "ab aeterno autem Deus praedestinavit beneficia quae sanctis suis erat daturus. Unde praedestinatio est aeterna. Differt autem a praescientia secundum rationem, quia praescientia importat solam notitiam futurorum: sed praedestinatio importat causalitatem quamdam respectu eorum. Et ideo Deus habet praescientiam etiam de peccatis, sed praedestinatio est de bonis salutaribus".

<sup>17</sup> *Ad Eph.*, 1, 1, n. 11: "causa praedestinationis divinae non est necessitas ex parte Dei, nec debitum ex parte praedestinatorum, sed magis est secundum propositum voluntatis suae".

reason, although not from a discursive reason.<sup>18</sup> In other words, God does not act arbitrarily or irrationally.

Since predestination is not linked to a necessity in creatures, it presupposes election, and election presupposes love. In God, love, election and predestination are identical; they only differ in our understanding, explains Aquinas. The same reality is called *God's love* when it expresses that He wills good for someone in an absolute sense, *election* when God wants a specific good for that person and because of it he prefers that person to another, and *predestination* when he guides this person towards that good that he wills for him by loving him and choosing him.<sup>19</sup>

In other words, election and love are ordered differently in God than in man. In man, election precedes love, because the will is inclined to love the good that he has first perceived in the thing: man chooses and then loves. God's will, on the other hand, is the cause of every good found in a creature. Therefore, the good for which one is preferred to another, according to the election, follows the loving will of God. God does not love a man because of a good that is present in him, but because he loves him, he prefers him to others by election.<sup>20</sup>

When man's love is caused by the goodness of the beloved, in a certain way the love for that person is due. But when love causes the goodness of the beloved, it is a love that comes from mercy.<sup>21</sup> The love by which God loves us causes the goodness in us, and because of that, mercy is the root of divine love.<sup>22</sup>

<sup>18</sup> Cf. *Ad Eph.*, 1, 4, n. 34: "non autem dicit *secundum voluntatem*, ne credas quod sit irrationabilis, sed *secundum consilium voluntatis suae*, id est secundum voluntatem suam quae est ex ratione, non secundum quod ratio importat discursum, sed secundum quod designat certam et deliberatam voluntatem".

<sup>19</sup> Cf. *Ad Rom.*, 9, 2, n. 763: "est autem in his verbis apostoli considerandum, quod tria ponit in Deo pertinentia ad sanctos, videlicet electionem, per quam intelligitur praedestinatio, et electio Dei, quae quidem realiter sunt idem in Deo, sed differunt ratione. Nam ipsa Dei dilectio dicitur secundum quod vult bonum alicui absolute; electio autem dicitur secundum quod per bonum quod alicui vult, eum alteri praefert; praedestinatio autem est secundum quod hominem dirigit in id bonum quod ei vult, diligendo et eligendo".

<sup>20</sup> Cf. *Ad Rom.*, 9, 2, n. 763: "electio autem et dilectio aliter ordinantur in Deo et in homine. In homine enim electio praecedit dilectionem, voluntas enim hominis movetur ad amandum ex bono quod in re amata considerat, ratione cuius ipsam praelegit alteri et praelectae suum amorem impendit. Sed voluntas Dei est causa omnis boni quod est in creatura et ideo bonum per quod una creatura praefertur alteri per modum electionis, consequitur voluntatem Dei, quae est de bono illius, quae pertinet ad rationem dilectionis. Unde non propter aliquod bonum quod in homine eligat Deus eum diligit, sed potius eo quod ipsum diligit, praefert eum aliis eligendo". In similar terms as those exposed here St. Thomas expresses himself in *ST I*, q. 23, a. 4, c.

<sup>21</sup> "The qualities of God that one finds related to election are his love (Eph 1:4-5; 1 Thess 1:4), mercy (Rom 9:16), grace (Rom 11:5) and wisdom and knowledge (Rom 11:33). For Paul it is the God of love and mercy, acting graciously and wisely, who is the electing God. This would be enough to silence anyone who might imagine that God was arbitrary and chose without any rationale at all" (ELWELL, *Election*, 225).

<sup>22</sup> Cf. *Ad Eph.*, 2, 2, n. 86: "dicit autem *qui dives est in misericordia*, quia cum amor hominis causetur ex bonitate eius qui diligitur, tunc homo ille qui diligit, diligit ex iustitia, inquantum iustum est

### 3. Human Freedom

Now, if divine election or predestination proceeds from the merciful will of God, how can we make compatible that absolute love with the fact that He chooses some to be saved and tolerates others to be condemned? Or in other words, if He is Almighty, why does He not also deliver the ones He knows will be condemned? The first answer to these questions is that predestination presupposes personal conversion. That is to say, human freedom moved by grace is included among the salvific goods to which predestination refers.<sup>23</sup>

With this answer, however, the reason for the divine choice in part remains a mystery. In fact, both St. Paul and St. Thomas recognize it. The Apostle exclaims: "O the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways!" (Rom 11:33) and the Angelic Doctor comments that the Apostle, after trying to find the reason why both Jews and Gentiles have obtained mercy, recognizes himself as unable to examine this reality, only to admire it.<sup>24</sup>

On the other hand, the Pauline Commentaries of St. Thomas refer to the mystery of the Incarnation as the moment of the encounter between God's eternity and man's time. This, as we shall see later, illuminates and helps us to better understand divine mercy as the root of predestination and, therefore, predestination as a reason for our hope.

### 4. Christ, the first Predestined, the Reason for our Hope

Matthew Levering, in his study of the Thomistic exegesis to Romans, affirms that divine predestination is accomplished principally in the missions of the Son and the Holy Spirit, through which we are freely led to the Father. In these missions, and through their temporal effects, man finds his own mission, which consists in living by the faith, hope and charity received.<sup>25</sup> According to Levering:

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quod talem amet. Quando vero amor causat bonitatem in dilecto, tunc est amor procedens ex misericordia. Amor autem quo Deus amat nos, causat in nobis bonitatem, et ideo misericordia ponitur hic quasi radix amoris divini". Is. LXIII, 7: "*largitus est in eis secundum indulgentiam suam, et secundum multitudinem miserationum suarum*".

<sup>23</sup> Cf. *II Ad Tim.*, 2, 3, n. 71: "huius firmitas dependet primo ex divina praedestinatione; secundo ex libero arbitrio nostro".

<sup>24</sup> Cf. *Ad Rom.*, 11, 5, n. 933: "supra apostolus conatus fuit assignare rationem divinorum iudiciorum quibus tam gentes, quam Iudaei post incredulitatem misericordiam consequuntur, nunc, quasi ad haec investiganda se insufficientem recognoscens, exclamando divinam excellentiam admiratur".

<sup>25</sup> "As Aquinas recognizes, for Paul the God who 'foreknew' and 'predestined' is none other than the Son and the Holy Spirit whose temporal missions lead us to the Father. In and through these divine missions, with their manifold temporal effects, we find our mission of faith, hope and charity

Even more than *Summa theologiae* I, question 23, Aquinas's commentary on Romans 8 makes clear that were one to suppose that "predestination" means merely an aloof divine decision to save some individual human beings, one would have profoundly misunderstood the doctrine.<sup>26</sup>

Christ, like all men, is part of the order of predestination: He is the first predestined. At the same time, his predestination does not have the same purpose as the rest of the human race. The goal of our predestination is the adoptive filiation; instead, Christ is predestined to be the eternal Son of God, that is, he is the cause and paradigm of our new filiation.<sup>27</sup>

St. Thomas explains that predestination is directly attributed to the Person of Christ, whose human nature can only be separated mentally from the divine nature, after the Incarnation.<sup>28</sup> In other words, in the measure in which Christ, in fact, assumes human nature, we speak of his predestination. The Incarnation is the mystery that illuminates his interpretation.

This nuance allows us to better understand the predestination of other persons. In a similar sense as in the case of Christ, the eternal predestination of believers, present in the Father's mysterious plan, is a real fact insofar as human beings accept grace. Michał Paluch explains it with the following words:

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(...). As a christological and pneumatological reality, predestination consists in our being taken up into the missions of the Son and the Spirit" (M. LEVERING, *Aquinas on Romans 8. Predestination in Context* in M. LEVERING; M. DAUPHINAIS (Edd.), *Reading Romans with St. Thomas Aquinas*, The Catholic University of America Press, Washington, D.C 2012, 196-215, 214-215).

<sup>26</sup> LEVERING, *Aquinas*, 214.

<sup>27</sup> Cf. *Ad Rom.*, 1, 3, n. 48: "manifestum est autem quod id quod est per se est mensura et regula eorum quae dicuntur per aliud et per participationem. Unde praedestinatio Christi, qui est praedestinatus ut sit Filius Dei per naturam, est mensura et regula vitae et ita praedestinationis nostrae, quia praedestinamur in filiationem adoptivam, quae est quaedam participatio et imago naturalis filiationis, secundum illud Rom. VIII, 30: *quos praescivit et praedestinavit conformes fieri imagini filii sui*".

<sup>28</sup> Cf. *Ad Rom.*, 1, 3, n. 52: "est autem alia ratio de hoc participio *factus*, quod designat actum realem, et de hoc participio *praedestinatus*, quod designat actum animae. Anima enim, secundum suum intellectum et rationem, potest distinguere ea quae sunt secundum rem coniuncta. Potest enim aliquis de pariete albo cogitare et loqui seorsum quidem quantum ad hoc quod est paries, seorsum autem ex hoc quod est albus. Ita etiam in praedestinatione. Nam praedestinatio potest attribui personae Christi secundum quod subsistit in humana natura, licet non attribuiatur ei secundum quod subsistit in divina. Unde et apostolus prius Filium Dei incarnatum esse praemiserat, et postea ei praedestinationem attribuit, ut intelligatur praedestinatus esse secundum quod factus est ex semine David secundum carnem. Et sic a Filio Dei, explicando incarnationis mysterium, descendit ad carnem, et a carne, secundum praedestinationem, ascendit ad Filium Dei, ut ostendatur quod neque gloria divinitatis impedivit infirmitatem carnis, neque infirmitas carnis diminuit maiestatem Dei". In *ST III*, q. 24, a. 1, ad. 3, Aquinas offers a similar explanation.

In Thomas, there are truths that are not attainable except by their realization in history. The incarnation and predestination, both gifts of grace realized in history, belong, without any doubt, to this order. But there is a difference between them. While the incarnation is already carried out, the predestination that leads us to the adoptive filiation, and so to the completion of the purpose of the incarnation, is still in the process of its realization. This situation limits our ability to approach this mystery (...). In the words of Thomas, we can conclude that we have predestination *in generali*, but we cannot know *in speciali*. It has been made known to us the general plan to make us adoptive sons, but until this plan is in fact accomplished, we will not be able to touch it (...). If our interpretation is correct, we are in front of an aspect of the Thomistic doctrine that can be considered as the hermeneutic key of the whole doctrine on predestination: our theological knowledge is and must be conditioned by the fact that we are in the history of salvation, which has not yet come to an end because of our situation as *viatores*. In the light of the biblical commentaries, the impossibility of finding a completely satisfactory metaphysical solution to this mystery can be considered inevitable.<sup>29</sup>

In other words, we speak about the predestination of Christ in the light of the Incarnation. In some way, what is done determines what is predestined. At the same time, in Christ the goal to which he is addressing himself since his conception is already present. In this sense, the Incarnate Word, through his life, offers grace to all men. Glory, however, is only for those who accept it. Therefore, in a strict sense, the word predestination refers only to those who really participate in the life of Christ: that is, those who are in fact incorporated in Christ are predestined.

In order to better understand these affirmations, we move to the last part of this paper.

## 5. “He Predestined us in Love to be his Sons through Jesus Christ” (Eph 1:5)

In the commentary of Aquinas on the hymn of thanksgiving, at the beginning of the Ephesians, Aquinas explains that the temporal object of God's eternal election, in the first place, is the Church. In other words, the aim of predestination is collective and individual, and it consists mainly in the constitution of a Body in which salvific goods are always present. According to St. Thomas, the Body of Christ includes, at least in potency, all men during their life on earth, because Christ died for the salvation of the whole humanity, without exception.<sup>30</sup>

<sup>29</sup> M. PALUCH, OP, *La Profondeur de l'Amor Divin: Evolution de la doctrine de la predestination dans l'oeuvre de saint Thomas d'Aquin* (Paris: Librairie Philosophique J. Vrin, 2004), 270.

<sup>30</sup> Cf. *Ad Eph.*, 1, 1, n. 5: “beneficia vero exhibita generaliter humano generi tangit sex. (...) Tertium praedestinationis, in praeordinata associatione cum bonis, scilicet cum filiis adoptionis, ibi qui



Now, if God is infinitely merciful, why does he choose some and not others? Is it possible for someone to condemn himself because he received less grace than another? Why does God not avoid the condemnation of those he knows will reject him?

To answer these questions, it seems more appropriate to focus on what God does rather than what God does not do in relation to men. God, in the first place, sends his Son into the world to make present his eternal mercy through the action of the Paraclete. Christ in his glory is the cause of the greatest goods for us. That is why he is the cause of the only true hope: the possibility of attaining eternal life. In Christ, God effectively makes present his will of absolute and unconditional donation to men.

At the same time, not all men receive the same graces. Aquinas explains that there are some, like Mary or the Apostles, specially chosen by God to fulfil a mission: to establish the Church. In regard to this mission, they receive greater grace than others. If they are faithful to it, they can reach a higher grade of holiness than other men. However, their responsibility before God is greater, and the grace received is not synonymous of an automatic divine action in them, but rather of an often heroic human correspondence. St. Paul's relentless struggle to fulfil his mission reflects this clearly. On the other hand, the superabundant graces that God gives to some, as they correspond, are multiplied by being given to others.<sup>31</sup>

God's election does not mean that He does not love each individual person unconditionally. He wants each one to be saved, and in order to do that, he permanently gives him the necessary graces. Aquinas affirms that God does not predestine some because he knows beforehand that they will do well and believe in Christ, but that under the concept of predestination every good of salvation that God has prepared for man from eternity is included. Not only eternal life, but also all the graces that move us to accept eternal life. Otherwise, it would mean falling into the error of Pelagianism.<sup>32</sup>

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*praedestinavit nos*"; *Ad Eph.*, 1, 1, n. 9: "dicit ergo *qui*, scilicet Deus, *praedestinavit nos*, id est sola gratia praelegit, *in adoptionem filiorum*, id est ut associaremur cum aliis filiis adoptionis in bonis, quae habituri sunt" and *Ad Tit.*, 2, 3, n. 68: "ex hac gratia, secundo, est consecuta instructio humani generis; quia ante Christum fuit mundus in ignorantia et haeresi".

<sup>31</sup> Cfr. *Ad Rom.*, 8, 5, n. 678: "unicuique autem dat gratiam proportionatam ei ad quod eligitur, sicut homini Christo data est excellentissima gratia, (...), et post eum habuit maximam plenitudinem gratiae beata Maria, quae ad hoc est electa ut esset mater Christi. Inter caeteros autem ad maiorem dignitatem sunt electi apostoli, ut scilicet immediate ab ipso Christo accipientes, aliis traderent ea, quae pertinent ad salutem, et sic in eis Ecclesia quodammodo fundaretur (...). Et ideo Deus eis abundantior gratiam prae caeteris tribuit". See also *Ad Rom.*, 11, 3, n. 896; *I Ad Cor.*, 3, 2, n. 152; *Ad Eph.*, 1, 6, n. 55; 12, 3, n. 755.

<sup>32</sup> Cf. *Ad Rom.*, 8, 6, n. 703: "circa ordinem autem praescientiae et praedestinationis dicunt quidam quod praescientia meritorum bonorum et malorum est ratio praedestinationis et reprobationis, ut scilicet intelligatur quod Deus praedestinet aliquos, quia praescit eos bene operaturos, et in Christum credituros. Et secundum hoc littera sic legitur: *quos praescivit conformes fieri imaginis Filii eius, hos praedestinavit*. Et hoc quidem rationabiliter diceretur, si praedestinatio respiceret tantum vitam aeternam, quae datur meritis; sed sub praedestinatione cadit omne beneficium salutare, quod est homini ab aeterno divinitus praeparatum; unde eadem ratione omnia beneficia quae nobis confert

In other words, no one is condemned because of a supposed divine injustice: God gives each one a superabundant grace for his personal salvation. Every man is chosen in Christ with the same unconditional love with which the Son relates to his Father in divine eternity. The believer who, in fact, responds to that divine call, does so because from all eternity God has preceded him with his eternal love. That is, because God has predestined him.

## 6. Conclusions

Predestination presupposes freedom, and therefore also history. When we speak of it, we are introduced into the mystery of God's eternity, which comes in contact with time. The Incarnation is the meeting point, and Christ's life is the perfect response in history to the eternal will of the Father. Christ, we can affirm, is predestined in the "strong" sense of the word. This means that being the Son, his "eternal salvation" is "assured"; it is "indubitable" from the very first moment when he assumes a human nature, because in him the communion of Love is already perfect. At the same time, this necessary predestination of the Son is realized through his free human response. In this way, he obtains for us the divine filiation. Our adoptive filiation, then, is determined by God's unconditional self-giving and by Christ's free response.

Predestination for the rest of humankind is real to the extent that each person in his historical present opens himself to the grace of God. In this way, it is revealed little by little how the infinite divine will is present in the world and is a reason for hope. The definitive salvation that Christ brings to the world, reflection of the eternal gift of love in the intimacy of the Trinity, makes it possible to affirm that salvific grace is operative in history and that no one is *a priori* excluded from God's plan.

"The gifts and vocation of God are irrevocable" (11:29), writes the Apostle, and Aquinas explains that "gift" is understood here as a promise made according to God's foreknowledge and predestination. And "vocation" is understood as a choice. What God promises, the Dominican doctor continues, he always gives, and to those he chooses, he always calls. The temporal gift and vocation are not revocable by a change in God who repents, but by a change of man who rejects them.<sup>33</sup> In other words,

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ex tempore, praeparavit nobis ab aeterno. Unde ponere quod aliquod meritum ex parte nostra praesupponatur, cuius praesentia sit ratio praedestinationis, nihil est aliud quam gratiam ponere dari ex meritis nostris, et quod principium bonorum operum est ex nobis, et consummatio est ex Deo". In this sense, in the *ST*, q. 23, a. 5, c., Aquinas explains that even when God does not treat equally those who are not equal, he does not act unjustly, because predestination does not consist in the payment of a debt but in a gift of grace.

<sup>33</sup> Cf. *Ad Rom.*, 11, 4, n. 926: "ed dicendum est quod *donum* hic accipitur pro promissione, quae fit secundum Dei praesentiam vel praedestinationem. *Vocatio* autem hic accipitur pro electione, quia propter certitudinem utriusque, quod Deus promittit, iam quodammodo dat: et quos elegit, iam

the mystery of man's opposition to the power of grace is real and is a reflection that the power of freedom is also something real that God is not willing to revoke.

In short, predestination is related to the eternal mercy of God. This mercy, in Christians, produces the disposition of spirit that is proper to those who seek an arduous but possible goal, that is, it produces hope.<sup>34</sup> To those who open themselves to this action of God, He gives them the joyful certainty that nothing can harm them. Everything is for them occasion of good.<sup>35</sup> This is what St. Paul says in his Letter to the Romans: "for I am certain that neither death nor life nor angels nor principalities nor the present nor the future nor powers nor height nor depth nor any other creature will be able to separate us from the love of God manifested in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Rom 8:38-39).

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quodammodo vocat. Et tamen ipsum temporale Dei donum et temporalis vocatio, non irritatur per mutationem Dei quasi poenitentis sed per mutationem hominis, qui gratiam Dei abiicit".

<sup>34</sup> About "hope" in St Thomas' Commentary on the *corpus paulinum*, cf. C. VIAL DE AMESTI, *La gracia de Cristo en los Comentarios de Santo Tomás a las Cartas Paulinas*, Edusc, Roma 2019, pp. 290-301.

<sup>35</sup> Cf. *Ad Rom.*, 8, 6, n. 701: "nullus potest nocere his quos Deus promovet, sed praedestinos diligentes Deum, Deus promovet; ergo nihil potest eis nocere, sed omnia cedunt eis in bonum".

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