

# THE SALVIFIC WILL ACCORDING TO AQUINAS: AN INSPIRATION FOR CONTEMPORARY THEOLOGY?

MICHAŁ PALUCH, O.P.

The doctrine on the divine universal salvific will was developed as the interpretation of 1 Tm 2,4 according to which God “wants everyone to be saved and reach full knowledge of the truth” (ὁς πάντας ἀνθρώπους θέλει σωθῆναι, καὶ εἰς ἐπίγνωσιν ἀληθείας ἐλθεῖν, in Latin: *qui omnes homines vult salvos fieri et ad agnitionem veritatis venire*).<sup>1</sup> The authors of the XIII century had a common, mostly identical interpretation of this passage. Since eternal condemnation was understood as a fact that should be taken for granted, their main effort was focused on a possibility of reconciliation between the absolute efficiency of the divine will on the one hand and the purported failure of the universal salvific desire of God on the other.

In this paper I shall try to outline the common position on the universal salvific will of the thirteenth century’s authors (1), then present in a more detailed way Aquinas’s reflection on the crucial element of the systematic solution – the distinction between the antecedent and the consequent will (2) and, at the end, I shall attempt to highlight the relevant aspects of Aquinas’s proposal for a contemporary theological discussion (3).

## The common ground

The framework of the solutions presented in the XIII century consisted mostly of three explanations.<sup>2</sup> According to the first, the phrase “God wants everyone to be saved” should be understood as “everyone who will be saved may be saved because his salvation has been willed by God” or “only those will be saved whose salvation is wanted by God”

<sup>1</sup> The following paper was delivered on June 20, 2015, at the Pontifical Academy of Saint Thomas in the Vatican, as part of the conference “Religion and Religions. A Thomistic Look”.

<sup>2</sup> See for example: *Summa fratris Alexandri*, pars 1, inq. 1, tract. 6, q. 3, tit. 2, membr. 1; wyd. Quaracchi, t. 1, 373–374; Albertus Magnus, *In I Sent.*, d. 46, a. 1, ed. Borgnet, t. 26, 423–424; Bonaventura, *In I Sent.*, d. 46, a. un., q. 1, resp.; wyd. *Opera omnia*, t. 1, 820–821.

and not “there is no human being whose salvation God does not want”. There is an illustration to make such a proposal more intuitive: in a small town, all the children from this town are taught by the same teacher, and therefore there is no child who, if it is taught, is not taught by him.

The second explanation interprets the universality of the will as the universality concerning the different genera of people. So, “everyone” from the phrase “God wants everyone to be saved” means “every group of humankind”. In such a way salvation attributed by God embraces people of every tongue, of every profession or art, kings and subjects, the high and the low, the learned and the unlearned, the healthy and the sick and so on.

The third explanation of the Pauline thesis uses the distinction between the antecedent and the consequent will. God wants to save all people by his antecedent will but, taking into account the human response to his will, he wants to save only those who will be effectively saved. Although it is the only one and the same divine will, it has two sides or stages in our understanding: the first stage is called the antecedent will, the second stage the consequent will.

The first two explanations were taken from the *Enchiridion* (“Handbook on Faith, Hope and Love”) by Augustine.<sup>3</sup> The third one was explored by the medieval authors following John Damascene, although the roots of the distinction between the antecedent and the consequent will may be found in the work of Maxim the Confessor or even John Chrysostom.<sup>4</sup>

### Aquinas’s analysis

Aquinas follows this traditional pattern of interpretation in his main systematic works – in the *Commentary on the Sentences* and in the *Sum-*

<sup>3</sup> Augustinus, *Enchiridion ad Lauerentium: de fide et spe et caritate*, c. 103; CCSL 46, 104–106.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. *Die Schriften des Iohannes von Damaskus*. II. Expositio fidei – Ekthesis akribēs tēs orthodoxou pisteōs, ed. B. Kotter, II, c. 43, 102–103, l. 71–81 (book II, ch. 29; PG 94, 969 A–B), the Latin version: *De Fide Orthodoxa: versions of Burgundio and Cerbanus*, ed. E.M. Buytaert, “Franciscan Institute publications. Text series, 8”, St. Bonaventure N.Y.-Louvain 1955, 160. The connection to Maxim was showed by J.-M. Garrigues, «Le dessein d’adoption du Créateur dans son rapport au Fils d’après s. Maxime le Confesseur», in F. Heinzer et Ch. Schönborn, ed., *Maximus Confessor. Actes du Symposium sur Maxime le Confesseur*, (Fribourg, 2–5 septembre 1980), 173–192, 178. Franzelin was convinced that John Chrysostom invented the distinction. See M. Limbourg, SI, «Die Prädestinationslehre des heiligen Bonaventura», in *ZKTh* 16 (1892): 581–652; footnote 1, 582.

*ma theologiae*.<sup>5</sup> In his commentary on 1 Tm 2,4 in the *Corpus Paulinum* he adds one more explanation that was probably also inspired by the very same passage of the *Enchiridion*: we can understand that God wants something when he makes us want it; so, his will to save everyone may be understood as the will that God incites in his saints who want all people to be saved.<sup>6</sup> But, to be honest, it was not the search for a new solution that occupied Aquinas in his analysis. Neither did he devote much attention to the explanations delivered by Augustine in his *Enchiridion*. He just repeated them as other authors had done. His real interest was focused on the understanding of the antecedent and the consequent will. There is obviously nothing surprising in that. All the other solutions proposed only a more or less elegant way to elude a scriptural difficulty. They did not take the passage from the First Letter to Timothy sufficiently seriously. The distinction introduced by John Damascene promised some integration of the universal salvific will into a systematic description of the divine activities.

How should one understand the distinction? The main perspective had already been given by its author, John Damascene. He introduces the distinction in the chapter on providence. It enables him to show that good is dependent on God in a different way to that of evil. The antecedent will expresses the divine desire to bring about good – salvation – that is the fruit of his benevolent design. The consequent will is the will that takes into account human answers to the divine invitation. So, it is a fruit of the divine concession opening a possibility for human failure. Such a description seemed to be a necessary means to allow one to take into account human freedom in the description of divine providence.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>5</sup> See *In I Sent.*, d. 46, q. 1, a. 1, corp. and ad 1; *ST*, I, q. 19, a. 6, ad 1.

<sup>6</sup> See *Ad I Tim* 2, 1-6, ed. Marietti, no. 62. The references to the *Enchiridion* in the footnote 3.

<sup>7</sup> See the footnote 4. On the use of the distinction by Thomas see: F.J. Adelmann, "The theory of will in St. John Damascene", in Id., *The quest for the Absolute*, Chestnut Hill-The Hague 1966, 22-37; L.-M. Antoniotti, "La volonté divine antécédente et conséquente selon saint Jean Damascène et saint Thomas", in *Revue Thomiste* 63 (1965): 52-77. It was one of the important topics in the discussion between J.H. Nicolas OP and J. Maritain. See first of all: J.-H. Nicolas, "La permission du péché", *Revue Thomiste* 60 (1960): 5-37, 185-206, 509-546; J. Maritain, *Dieu et la permission du mal* (1963), in J. et R. Maritain, *Œuvres Complètes*, Fribourg-Paris: Éd. Universitaires – Éd. Saint-Paul, 1986-1999, vol. XII, 9-123.

This general description required precisions. Thomas will try to deliver them by exposing different aspects of the distinction at various periods of his career, as it is often the case in his work. I see three different stages of his reflection. Each of them is connected with, at least partly, another model of conceiving the distinction.

In his *Commentary on the Sentences* he understands the distinction through the pattern: nature – person.<sup>8</sup> The relationship between them should be understood in light of the definition by Boethius: nature is the rational prism through which an individual substance – a person – acts and exists. Understood in such a way, nature is shared with the other individuals belonging to the same genus, i.e. it gives universality. Person, on the other hand, gives the individuality that cannot be communicated to others.

If we apply such a model to the distinction *voluntas antecedens* – *voluntas consequens*, we must interpret the first as concerning the nature of all the individuals sharing it. The second regards the individual, taking into account its particular circumstances. So, God wants to save all who share in the human nature by the antecedent will but it does not necessarily mean that he wants to save each individual taking into account his or her particular circumstances.

This model will be in fact the most basic and it will be upheld by Thomas from the beginning to the end as the obvious background to the distinction. It has the great advantage underlining the unity of the divine will in an intuitive way – the distinction between nature and person is a distinction of reason, all of us may confirm it. Unfortunately, it has some important limits.

<sup>8</sup> *In I Sent*, d. 46, q. 1, a. 1, sol.:...voluntas est duplex, scilicet antecedens et consequens: et hoc contingit non ex aliqua diversitate voluntatis divinae, sed propter diversas condiciones ipsius voliti. Potest enim in unoquoque homine considerari natura ejus et aliae circumstantiae ipsius, ut quod est volens et praeparans se ad salutem suam, vel etiam repugnans et contrarie agens. Si ergo in homine tantum natura ipsius consideretur, aequaliter bonum est omnem hominem salvari: quia omnes conveniunt in natura humana. Et cum omne bonum sit volitum a Deo, hoc etiam Deus vult, et hoc vocatur voluntas antecedens, qua omnes homines salvos fieri vult...Et hujus voluntatis effectus est ipse ordo naturae in finem salutis et promoventia in finem omnibus communiter proposita, tam naturalia quam gratuita, sicut potentiae naturales et praecepta legis, et hujusmodi. Consideratis autem omnibus circumstantiis personae, sic non invenitur de omnibus bonum esse quod salventur; bonum enim est eum qui se praeparat et consentit salvari per largitatem gratiae divinae; nolentem vero et resistentem non est bonum salvari, quia injustum est...

The first concerns the relationship between the universal and the particular. How to understand the universality of the antecedent will and the universality of its model – nature? Thomas discerns two understandings of nature. It may be understood as an intellectual species (*species intelligibile*) – abstracted by our intellect from being and it may be understood as an essence (*essentia*) composing a being with the act of existence (*esse*).<sup>9</sup> Thomas seems to be inclined to present the antecedent will according to the first understanding.<sup>10</sup> But such an interpretation puts the antecedent will in an area of abstraction that in fact is only an ideal that is not real – does not happen in its ideal shape. Is it really sufficient to interpret the universal salvific will in this way?

Even though we understood the antecedent will as real, i.e. somehow put into practice, it would provoke another difficulty. If the antecedent will contains a kind of universal program for human nature which may be, as Thomas says himself, not accomplished, it opens the possibility that the antecedent will sometimes is accomplished and sometimes is not. So be it. Unfortunately, the obvious difficulty with such an understanding is not only that we are faced by the problem of the will of the omnipotent God which cannot be accomplished – it is the problem of this doctrine independently of the model in the background – but we have to admit two kinds of divine activities in the world: there are some effects that are produced by the divine will which have not been halted by human rejection and there are some other effects produced by the will that have been halted by it. It opens the way to the image of the twofold divine activity articulated in the *De auxiliis* controversy i.a. by the distinction of *gratia sufficiens* and *gratia efficax*. If we agree that there are two different effects of the divine will in the created world corresponding to the two different activities, we lose the unity of the divine will.

Probably because of the above-mentioned problems Thomas was not satisfied with his teaching on the antecedent and the consequent will in the *Commentary on the Sentences*. In the *De veritate* one can see that he intensely reflected on it with another model as its background. This

<sup>9</sup> The classical text on that: ...Natura autem uel essentia...potest dupliciter considerari. Vno modo secundum rationem propriam, et hec est absoluta consideratio ipsius... Alio modo consideratur secundum esse quod habet in hoc uel in illo... *De ente et essentia*, c. 3.

<sup>10</sup> Thomas tries to develop an analogy between *voluntas antecedens* and *scientia speculativa*. See *In I Sent.*, d. 47, q. 1, a. 1, sol.

time he made use of the relationship agent – patient.<sup>11</sup> The operation of every agent meets some resistance. So, the intention of the agent, which is the point of departure (*prima intentio*), is the antecedent will. The intention of the agent taking into account the resistance of the patient is the consequent will (*secunda intentio*). One may object that it is not the case of God because he acts inside the natures that have been created by him and he may waive aside all the possible obstacles on the created side.

<sup>11</sup> *De veritate*, q. 23, a. 2, corp.: Voluntas divina per antecedentem et consequentem convenienter distinguitur. Cuius distinctionis intellectus ex verbis Damasceni est assumendus, qui hanc distinctionem introduxit; dicit enim in II libro quod “voluntas antecedens est acceptio Dei ex ipso existens, sed voluntas consequens est concessio ex nostra causa”. Ad cuius evidentiam sciendum est quod in qualibet actione est aliquid considerandum ex parte agentis et aliquid ex parte recipientis; et sicut agens est prius facto et principalius, ita id quod est ex parte facientis est prius naturaliter eo quod est ex parte facti, sicut patet in operatione naturae, quod ex parte virtutis formativae quae est in semine est quod animal perfectum producatur; sed ex parte materiae recipientis, quae quandoque est indisposita, contingit quandoque quod non producitur perfectum animal sicut contingit in partibus monstruosis. Et sic dicimus de prima intentione naturae esse quod animal perfectum producatur; sed quod producatur animal imperfectum est ex secunda intentione naturae quae ex quo non potest materiae propter suam indispositionem tradere formam perfectionis, tradit ei id cuius est capax.

Et similiter etiam est considerandum in operatione Dei qua operatur in creaturis. Quamvis enim ipse in sua operatione materiam non requirat et res a principio creaverit nulla materia praeexistente, nunc tamen operatur in rebus quas primo creavit eas administrans praesupposita natura quam prius eis dedit. Et quamvis etiam possit a creaturis omne impedimentum auferre quo perfectionis incapaces existunt, tamen secundum ordinem sapientiae suae disponit de rebus secundum earum condicionem ut unicuique tribuat secundum suum modum. Illud ergo ad quod Deus creaturam ordinavit quantum est de se, dicitur esse volitum ab eo quasi prima intentione sive voluntate antecedente; sed quando creatura impeditur propter sui defectum ab hoc fine, nihilominus tamen Deus implet in ea id bonitatis cuius est capax; et hoc est quasi de secunda intentione eius et dicitur voluntas consequens. Quia ergo Deus omnes homines propter beatitudinem fecit, dicitur voluntate antecedente omnium salutem velle; sed quia quidam suae saluti adversantur, quos ordo suae sapientiae ad salutem venire non patitur propter eorum defectum, implet in eis alio modo id quod ad suam bonitatem pertinet, scilicet eos per iustitiam damnans ut sic dum a primo ordine voluntatis deficient in secundum labantur, et dum Dei voluntatem non faciunt impleatur in eis voluntas Dei. Ipse autem defectus peccati quo aliquis redditur dignus poena in praesenti vel in futuro, non est volitus a Deo neque voluntate antecedente neque consequente, sed est ab eo solummodo permissus.

Nec tamen intelligendum est ex praedictis quod intentio Dei frustrari possit, quia istum qui non salvatur praescivit ab aeterno fore non salvandum; nec ordinavit ipsum in salutem secundum ordinem praedestinationis, qui est ordo absolutae voluntatis, sed quantum ex parte sua est dedit ei naturam ad beatitudinem ordinatam.

But Thomas stresses in such a context that God wants to give a relative autonomy to his creatures and that he works inside them and through them saving their natures.<sup>12</sup>

Such an explanation was closer to the proposal of John Damascene and it was simpler than preceding one. The connection to the general description of operation in nature (agent – patient) gave to this explanation a cosmic reach. Every divine action could be inscribed in the proposed model – could be placed between the *prima intentio* of the Creator and the *secunda intentio* of the Provident God. It excluded the possibility of understanding the antecedent will as unreal and it articulated even better, than the preceding explanation, the unity of the divine operation of God.

I think that it would not be exaggerated to say that in the *De veritate* Aquinas's teaching on the antecedent and the consequent will reached its maturity. Nevertheless, it was not the last stage of Aquinas's reflection on this distinction. Before coming to it, I have to give you a larger view of the background of Aquinas's analysis.

It is quite astonishing to discover that the mature version of the explanation of the distinction was at the same time the turning point in Aquinas's use of it. According to my calculation 86% of the texts in which Thomas made use of the distinction are to be located before 1260.<sup>13</sup> After that date Thomas uses the distinction only in the context in which it was traditionally cited, so in the passages on the universal salvific will. The distinction disappears as a main tool of his systematic analysis in the sections on the divine will in the *Summa contra gentiles* (do not forget that the third book of this *Summa* is a very developed analysis of finality and providence!) and in the *Summa theologiae*. In the *Commentary on the Sentences* and in the *De veritate* the distinction was one of the most visible intellectual devices to describe the divine will.

There are in my opinion two main reasons for this change. The first concerns Aquinas's thinking on causality. During his work on the *De veritate* Thomas discovers that the mode of existence of the effect – necessity

<sup>12</sup> In such a context Thomas uses the adage taken from the work of Pseudo-Dionysius: ...non est providentiae naturas rei destruere, sed salvare. In *I Sent*, d. 39, q. 2, a. 2, sol. See also: d. 41, a. 4, ad 1; *II Sent*, d. 25, q. 1, a. 1, ad 3. Cf. *De divinis nominibus*, IV, 20; *Dionysiaca*, vol. 1, 312.

<sup>13</sup> See M. Paluch, "La profondeur de l'amour divin". *Evolution de la doctrine de la prédestination dans l'œuvre de Thomas d'Aquin*, Paris: J. Vrin, 2004 (Bibliothèque thomiste, 55), footnote 1, 275 and footnote 1, 284. For the context I try to outline in the following passage see 273–290.



or contingency – should not be understood as dependent on the cause closest to the effect (*causa proxima*) but that it should be understood as defined by the first cause.<sup>14</sup> In other words, God not only wants something to happen, he wants it to happen according to a definite mode – necessarily or contingently. This speculative insight was of great importance in drawing conclusions from the fact that the first cause must be understood as transcendent. And the stronger articulation of transcendence in the description of the divine causality made in turn the need to bring out the liberty of created causes less imperative. If we understand that the first cause does not operate on the same level as the created causes do, we obtain the main argument for preserving human freedom. We do not need intuitive descriptions of the common work of the first and second causality. We can even be suspicious of such descriptions because they may compromise the transcendence of the first cause.

The second reason is, in my opinion, strictly connected to the first. Working on the *De veritate* Thomas discovers that if he wants to describe the divine will and integrate into this description contingent actions, a part of which are choices of human liberty, he does not need to use the distinction suggesting some division inside the divine will. He tries to present the issue from a different point of view, i.e. to consider different modes of imposing necessity by the divine will. If the issue is considered this way, the analysis will show that something may happen with absolute necessity (*necessitas absoluta*) and something may happen with necessity

<sup>14</sup> On the dependence on the *causa proxima*, see for example: *In I Sent.*, d. 38, q. 1, a. 5, sol. (ed. Mandonnet, 909). The criticism of such a solution: *De veritate*, q. 2, a. 12, ad 7. The first text with a new solution: *De veritate*, q. 6, a. 3, ad 3: Deus agit in voluntatem non per modum necessitatis quia voluntatem non cogit, sed movet eam non auferendo ei modum suum qui in libertate ad utrumlibet consistit; et ideo quamvis nihil divinae voluntati resistat, tamen voluntas et quaelibet alia res exequitur divinam voluntatem secundum modum suum quia et ipsum modum divina voluntas rebus dedit ut sic eius voluntas impleretur: et ideo quaedam explent divinam voluntatem necessario, quaedam vero contingenter, quamvis illud quod Deus vult semper fiat. See also *De veritate*, q. 23, a. 5, corp. On the importance of this change, see B.J.F. Lonergan, *Gnade und Freiheit: Die operative Gnade im Denken des hl. Thomas von Aquin*, trans. P. Fluri and G.B. Sala (Innsbruck: Tyrolia-Verlag, 1998), 110–12; B. McGinn, “The Development of the Thought of Thomas Aquinas on the Reconciliation of Divine Providence and Contingent Action”, *The Thomist* 39 (1975): 741–52, esp. 748. More about this issue with numerous references: M. Paluch, *La profondeur de l’amour*, op. cit., 143–145.



supposing a purpose (*necessitas ex suppositione finis*).<sup>15</sup> God wants his own good with absolute necessity and everything else with necessity supposing his good as the purpose of his operation. Such a description expresses the different status of all the operations that take place “outside” of God but at the same time it allows us to integrate all the contingent actions as willed by God and somehow directed to the divine good.

The distinction between the two aforementioned kinds of necessity does not absolutely match the content of the distinction between the antecedent and the consequent will. Each of these distinctions produces a different approach to contingency. The distinction between the antecedent and the consequent will places our analysis between *exitus* and *reditus*, between God Creator and God Provident. The distinction of necessities places our consideration in a *post factum* with the creative act of God as the main *exemplar* of the divine action. But both of them have a similar structure and both serve Thomas as a tool to embrace contingency in the speculative analysis of the divine operation. The distinction *voluntas antecedens – consequens* in the *Commentary on the Sentences*. The distinction *necessitas absoluta – necessitas ex suppositione* in the *Summa contra gentiles* and the *Summa theologiae*.

After this rapid overview of the changes in Aquinas’s teaching on the divine will, let us return to the understanding of the distinction of the antecedent and the consequent will. As I have already mentioned, although Thomas changed the tool serving the integration of contingency into his systematic explanation of the operation of the divine will after 1260, he did not avoid speaking about the antecedent and the consequent will in the explanations of 1 Tm 2,4. So, we can find the third and last stage of his reflection on the distinction in the *Summa theologiae*. This time the model he uses may be described as a succession of considerations.<sup>16</sup> To

<sup>15</sup> This distinction has its complex background that I tried to present in: M. Paluch, “Note sur les distinctions entre les nécessités chez Thomas d’Aquin”, in: *Archives d’Histoire Doctrinale et Littéraire du Moyen Âge*, 70 (2003): 219-231.

<sup>16</sup> *ST I*, q. 19, a. 6, ad 1: ... Tertio, secundum Damascenum, intelligitur de voluntate antecedente, non de voluntate consequente. Quae quidem distinctio non accipitur ex parte ipsius voluntatis divinae, in qua nihil est prius vel posterius; sed ex parte volitorum. Ad cuius intellectum, considerandum est quod unumquodque, secundum quod bonum est, sic est volitum a Deo. Aliquid autem potest esse in prima sui consideratione, secundum quod absolute consideratur, bonum vel malum, quod tamen, prout cum aliquo adiuncto consideratur, quae est consequens consideratio eius, e contrario se habet. Sicut hominem vivere est bonum, et hominem occidi est malum, secundum absolutam

be honest, this model was already contained in the description presented in the *Commentary on the Sentences* but in the *Summa theologiae* it appears with the stress on succession. In contrast to the two preceding models that were metaphysical, this model is rather psychological. The *first* consideration bringing out the antecedent will focuses on the primordial good of a being. The *second* consideration exposing the consequent will takes into account all the particular circumstances of that being. So, according to the given example, the life of a man is always worth being protected in light of the first consideration. But in the light of the second, taking into account that this man committed a homicide, it may be good to rid him of his life.

Such an interpretation confirmed the understanding of the antecedent will as universal and the consequent one as particular – we find it from the beginning in Aquinas's explanation and I mentioned the difficulties connected to it. But Thomas took a step further in the *Summa theologiae* by developing an analogy between the two aspects of the divine will and our experience. He compared the antecedent will to willingness (*velleitas*) which is not put into practice. It is only the consequent will that is the will in the full term (*simpliciter*) – the will that really happens. I do not need to add that such an explanation is in my opinion a regression, if compared with the teaching developed in the *De veritate*. I understand it as a fruit of the change of focus in Aquinas's work. He is not so interested as he was at the time of the *De veritate* to develop a convincing doctrine of the antecedent and the consequent will. He has another tool to integrate contingency in the divine operation.

considerationem: sed si addatur circa aliquem hominem, quod sit homicida, vel vivens in periculum multitudinis, sic bonum est eum occidi, et malum est eum vivere. Unde potest dici quod iudex iustus antecedenter vult omnem hominem vivere; sed consequenter vult homicidam suspendi. Similiter Deus antecedenter vult omnem hominem salvari; sed consequenter vult quosdam damnari, secundum exigentiam suae iustitiae. Neque tamen id quod antecedenter volumus, simpliciter volumus, sed secundum quid. Quia voluntas comparatur ad res, secundum quod in seipsis sunt: in seipsis autem sunt in particulari: unde simpliciter volumus aliquid, secundum quod volumus illud consideratis omnibus circumstantiis particularibus: quod est consequenter velle. Unde potest dici quod iudex iustus simpliciter vult homicidam suspendi: sed secundum quid vellet eum vivere, scilicet in quantum est homo. Unde magis potest dici velleitas, quam absoluta voluntas. Et sic patet quod quidquid Deus simpliciter vult, fit; licet illud quod antecedenter vult, non fiat.

## Relevance for contemporary discussions?

Are the intricacies presented here of any value for our contemporary debate? I want to propose three reflections to outline some possible answers to that question.

I. Discussing the antecedent and the consequent will, the Thomists focused on the ontological status of the antecedent will. Should it be understood as a true will – the will of good pleasure (*voluntas beneplaciti*) – or is it rather a will taken metaphorically – the will of expression (*voluntas signi*)?<sup>17</sup> As we have seen, Thomas does not hesitate to compare the antecedent will to willingness (*velleitas*) in the *Summa theologiae*. Throughout his whole career he liked to oppose the antecedent to the consequent will as a relative will (*voluntas secundum quid*) to the absolute will (*voluntas simpliciter*). The ontological question must have become in such circumstances an obvious challenge.

Nevertheless, without making light of this complicated issue, I think that the interpretations of Aquinas's thinking focused only on the ontological question quite often missed a more important point. If my reconstruction of the development in his work is correct, Thomas changed the distinction that served him to integrate contingency into the divine operation but his approach to this subject remained twofold. Even though he tried to avoid speaking about a distinction of will in God, he had to use another distinction when describing the divine operation with two complementary perspectives.

I see in such an attitude a very important avowal of apophatism. We have to approach the mystery of the divine action and human freedom with a humble recognition that we will not be able to describe it with one and unique speculative grasp. We need to articulate it always by using two complementary perspectives.

II. This apophatic avowal seems to me very Catholic. According to Erich Przywara, Catholicism has to show the way between two tendencies of modern thought that have deeply shaped our mentality: first pantheism articulated by Spinoza and Heidegger on the one hand, and second theopanism expressed by Luther and Barth on the other. The first tries to reduce God to the world, the second absorbs the world in God. Only the

<sup>17</sup> See on that issue: M. Paluch, *La profondeur de l'amour*, op. cit., footnote 1, 278 and footnote 1, 284.

Catholic articulation of the relative autonomy of the world is a balanced description of the relationship between God and the world.<sup>18</sup>

I am reminding you of this diagnosis of the modern intellectual situation because it was created partly in the discussion with Karl Barth's proposal. And Barth's proposal was probably the most spectacular 20<sup>th</sup> century's attempt to reinterpret the whole of theology in the light of the salvific will of God. It was for Barth the *Gnadenwahl* (the election of grace) that was the divine identity and the main clue to understand the divine action.<sup>19</sup> This powerful and, let us admit to seeing it this way, impatient summary of the Gospel remains very influential in some circles still today. So, it is important to stress that the twofold approach proposed by Thomas and by the Thomists is a very important part of a strategy articulating the relative autonomy of the world. A Catholic thinker needs and wants patiently to divide his reflection into two complementary grasps: God *ad intra* and God *ad extra* (the distinction of necessities), God Creator and God Provident (the distinction between the antecedent and the consequent will). These twofold grasps do not mean that the above mentioned realities are not interconnected. But they mean that we cannot impatiently drop such distinctions in our enchantment for the divine election of grace. They express our relative autonomy.

III. The theology of Przywara may perhaps do us one more good turn. His campaign to reinvigorate the Thomistic thought and to translate it in terms of a modern theological debate relied on a description of two complementary analogies that summarized, in his opinion, the essential of classical metaphysics. The first of them was horizontal or philosophical, Przywara expressed it in a formula "essence in-and-beyond existence", the second was vertical or theological and it was summarized by him as "God beyond-and-in the creature". I cannot enter here in the intricacies of his nuanced proposal. I would only like to underline the formula he used: "in-and-beyond" or "beyond-and-in". In the case of the horizontal

<sup>18</sup> See a brilliant introduction to the thought of Przywara: J. Betz, "Translator's Introduction", in E. Przywara, *Analogia Entis. Metaphysics: Original Structure and Universal Rhythm*, trans. J.R. Betz and D.B. Hart, Grand Rapids, MI – Cambridge, UK: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2014, 1-115, esp. 50-53.

<sup>19</sup> K. Barth, *Gottes Gnadenwahl*, München: C. Kaiser, 1936 (Theologische Existenz heute, 47); Id., "Gottes Gnadenwahl", in *Die kirchliche Dogmatik II/2: Die Lehre von Gott*, München-Zürich: Evangelischer Verlag, 1942, 1-563.

analogy it allowed him to show that the essence informs the fact of the creature's existence on the one hand but it is never fully "there" on the other hand – since the essence of a being is at the same time always *that to which* that being is underway. So, we find in a being an unavoidable tension between a being that is "such"(so) and that is "there" (da). Being "such" of a being is always to be attained, so that in its purity it is never really completely "there".<sup>20</sup>

I want to stress that I do not want to be an advocate here for the *analogia entis* by Przywara or for his Thomistic orthodoxy. It is a topic for a different conference and a different place. I want only ask the question of whether his simple formula serving to describe analogy could not be used to explain the relationship between the divine salvific universal will – the antecedent will according to Thomas – and the will of God we experience as actualized, as taking into account all the circumstances. The universal salvific will would be in such a way in-and-beyond the consequent will as the essence of a being is always in-and-beyond of its particularly actualized existence, and as the *logos* of an event – in the terms of saint Maxim the Confessor – is always in-and-beyond its *tropos*. Of course, such a description leads us back to the first model of interpretation proposed by Thomas in his *Commentary on the Sentences* according to which we should understand the relationship between the antecedent and consequent will through the pattern nature – person and it has its limits that I have mentioned above. Yet taking into account the new context of the proposal articulated by Przywara, it has promising potential for further explorations.

<sup>20</sup> E. Przywara, *Analogia Entis*, op. cit., 155–160. Cf. J. Betz, "Translator's Introduction", *ibidem*, 62–68.