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The Providence of God: A Polyphonic Approach. By David Fergusson. Cambridge: Cambridge University, 2018. Pp. 386. Price £90.00 (hbk). ISBN 9781108683050.

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At once sober-minded and dynamic, *The Providence of God* represents an eminently readable new monograph by well-known Scottish theologian David Fergusson. The book weaves together many previous models of providence, ranging from patristic to medieval to 20th-century ‘revisionist’ approaches (Chapter five: process theology, Barth, and general providence theories that repackage deism). The outcome is that one encounters a state-of-the-art portrayal of the many faces of providence. The final chapter involves a strong constructive element in which a Trinitarian framework is explicitly applied to providence. I highly recommend the book for postgraduates and scholars in historical and systematic theology. I can hardly do justice to any of the six chapters in the few pages here; I will prompt the reader up front that each chapter takes time to work through, but that is because they are more topical in structure and content. Each chapter contains a narrative of its own, inasmuch as any of them could function as a stand-alone essay. There is a coherent message overall of course, and a linear order, but each chapter can be read on its own if so desired (for teaching and lecturing purposes in the classroom).

The subtitle is crucial for Fergusson, since the book advances debate precisely on the strength of its basic message: a ‘polyphonic approach’ that intentionally reflects Scripture’s complex rendition of God’s covenant with creation. God is at once personal and wholly other than creation. God is at once at work in the world through the Spirit and is withdrawn until the eschatological resolution brings full harmony and peace in the world. If a reader were to ask for a key that unlocks the overall theme of the book, one could say that Fergusson attempts a loose and fluid fusion between occasionalism (God is involved at a causal level in every single detail that unfolds in the flow of time) and stoicism (God is removed altogether from the natural order), only if such a fusion promotes a biblical picture of providence (Fergusson is suspicious of metaphysics and Greek importations of divine causality). If we attribute divine causality to a natural disaster, say the famous Lisbon earthquake, then perhaps we have taken providence too far down the path of occasionalism. Did God punish us, oh, with an earthquake! Perhaps if we practiced our religion more faithfully, God would have spared us! Fergusson, I think wisely, claims that in the face of such occasionalism, ‘we need to incorporate elements of Deism into any satisfactory account of providence’ (p. 295). More on this in the final remarks.

Early in the book, Fergusson intends to complicate and ultimately overcome the ‘Latin Default Setting’ (Chapter two) concerning God’s rule over creation. While the book opens up providentialism to its many biblical trajectories and patristic emphases, a principal premise of the second half is that the default position of Augustine, and ultimately Aquinas, is fundamentally misguided (or incomplete), precisely because it does

not incorporate a plurality of interconnections between God and the world. It also tends toward a 'maximalist' view of providence: God the Father (at the unfortunate expense of the Son and Spirit) carries out his providential rule as a consequence of the attribute of omnipotence: 'God must have foresight, control and a will that disposes every actual outcome across the whole creation' (p. 10). This is providentialism of the overconfident and totalizing variety.

I am not quite convinced of this critique of Augustine and Aquinas, at least as it is prosecuted in Chapters two and six. Given my own debt to Augustinianism, the few pages devoted to the exposition of the massively complicated narrative of the *City of God* is insufficient (pp. 48–51). The eschatological incompleteness (and humility) sought by Fergusson is on full display in the second half of that timeless classic published in 430 CE. The pages devoted to Aquinas may be alone worth the price of the book. Perhaps a future work on Aquinas alone could enrich and tease out Fergusson's own Trinitarian vision.

The link between primary and secondary causality in Aquinas appears to be too ambiguous for Fergusson ('opacity of the link,' p. 73), since one of two extreme models of providence can be invoked from Thomism: either all-embracing occasionalism (or determinism) or its opposite, Deism. Does this double-mindedness not speak to the fertility and mystery of Aquinas on this very point? I could imagine here the underlying metaphysics of providence would only add to the tension, but perhaps tension is where we must terminate. Aquinas is emphatic that neither univocity of being (all of nature is collapsed into the Being of God) nor equivocity of being (nature and God are alienated one from the other) can handle the intimacy God enjoys with a creation that is wholly different in kind. Only analogy of being can serve the purpose of predication. However great a unity there is between God and creation, there is an ever greater difference. What is analogy of being exactly? Ultimately Aquinas claims that he does not know with precision, except to say that that analogy is 'the mean between pure equivocation and simple univocation,' in that it splits the difference between sameness (univocity) and difference (equivocity) (*Summa*, Part I, Q.13, A.5). We can appreciate Fergusson's critique of the Latin default setting nonetheless. He subsumes Augustine, Aquinas, Calvin, and Reformed Orthodoxy under the guiding narrative and internal logic of the Bible, for the Latin default setting appears to remain too much in the debt of Platonism and Stoicism. This may well be true.

Before making a comment on the final constructive chapter, I pause here to take stock of one interesting claim that is announced half way through the book (almost in passing). Fergusson navigates carefully, and with characteristic judiciousness, through Enlightenment and late modern paradigms of providence. Especially rich are Fergusson's considerations of time. Does God exist independently of time even though God assumes flesh in the person of Christ? Fergusson finds no clear answer in the biblical tradition. God is interpersonal, no doubt. One need only to read about one of the great Fathers or prophets of the Hebrew Bible, or read any of the gospels in the New Testament. The attribute of timelessness of God appears nowhere on the scene. So, Fergusson claims the attribute of timelessness must be a false import that distorts God, reconfiguring a personal God into a distance being who works only on the level of causation. God, for Fergusson, is not timeless, but fully in time, even while God also encapsulates time