

CHAPTER XVI

GOD BY HIS POWER NOURISHES AND MAINTAINS THE WORLD
CREATED BY HIM, AND RULES ITS SEVERAL PARTS BY
HIS PROVIDENCE¹

(God's special providence asserted, against the opinions of
philosophers, 1-4)

1. *Creation and providence inseparably joined*

Moreover, to make God a momentary Creator, who once for all finished his work, would be cold and barren, and we must differ from profane men especially in that we see the presence of divine power shining as much in the continuing state of the universe as in its inception. ^bFor even though the minds of the impious too are compelled by merely looking upon earth and heaven to rise up to the Creator, yet faith has its own peculiar way of assigning the whole credit for Creation to God. To this pertains that saying of the apostle's to which we have referred before,² that only "by faith we understand that the universe was created by the word of God" [Heb. 11:3]. For unless we pass on to his providence—however we may seem both to comprehend with the mind and to confess with the tongue—we do not yet properly grasp what it means to say: "God is Creator." Carnal sense, once confronted with the power of God in the very Creation, stops there, and at most weighs and contemplates only the wisdom, power, and goodness of the author in accomplishing such handiwork. (These matters are self-evident, and even force themselves upon the unwilling.) It contemplates, moreover, some general preserving and governing activity, from which the force of motion derives. ^cIn short, carnal sense thinks there is an energy divinely bestowed from the beginning, sufficient to sustain all things.

^bBut faith ought to penetrate more deeply, namely, having found him Creator of all, forthwith to conclude he is also everlasting Governor and Preserver—not only in that he drives the celestial frame³ as well as its several parts by a universal motion, but also in that he sustains, nourishes, and cares for, everything

¹ In editions 1539-1554, Calvin treated the topics of providence and predestination in the same chapter. In the final edition they are widely separated, providence being set here in the context of the knowledge of God the Creator, while predestination is postponed to III. xxi-xxiv, where it comes within the general treatment of the redemptive work of the Holy Spirit. See Benoit, *Institution* I. 221, note 2; P. Jacobs, *Prædestination und Verantwortlichkeit bei Calvin*, pp. 64-66, 71, *et passim*.

² In I. v. 14.

³ "Orbis machinam." Cf. I. x. 1, note 2.

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CALVIN:

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Edited by

JOHN T. MCNEILL

Auburn Professor Emeritus of Church History
Union Theological Seminary
New York

Translated and Indexed by

FORD LEWIS BATTLES

Philip Schaff Professor of Church History
The Hartford Theological Seminary
Hartford, Connecticut

in collaboration with the editor
and a committee of advisers

Philadelphia

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Book 1, CHAPTER 16 "on Providence"

3. *God's providence governs all*

^{60a}And truly God claims, and would have us grant him, omnipotence—not the empty, idle, and almost unconscious sort that the Sophists⁵ imagine, but a watchful, effective, active sort, “engaged in ceaseless activity. Not, indeed, an omnipotence that is only a general principle of confused motion, as if he were to command a river to flow through its once-appointed channels, but one that is directed toward individual and particular motions.”^{60b}For he is deemed omnipotent, not because he can indeed act, yet sometimes ceases and sits in idleness,^{60c} or continues by a general impulse that order of nature which he previously appointed; but because, governing heaven and earth by his providence, he so regulates all things that nothing takes place without his deliberation. For when, in The Psalms, it is said that “he does whatever he wills” [Ps. 115:3; cf. Ps. 113(b):3, Vg.], a certain and deliberate will is meant. For it would be senseless to interpret the words of the prophet after the manner of the philosophers, that God is the first agent because he is the beginning and cause of all motion,⁶¹ for in times of adversity believers comfort themselves with the solace that they suffer nothing except by God’s ordinance and command, for they are under his hand.

But if God’s governance is so extended to all his works, it is a childish cavil to enclose it within the stream of nature. Indeed, those as much defraud God of his glory as themselves of a most profitable doctrine who confine God’s providence to such narrow limits as though he allowed all things by a free course to be borne along according to a universal law of nature.⁷ For nothing would be more miserable than man if he were exposed to every movement of the sky, air, earth, and waters. Besides, in this way God’s particular goodness toward each one would be too unworthily reduced. David exclaims that infants still nursing at their mothers’ breasts are eloquent enough to celebrate God’s glory [Ps. 8:2], for immediately on coming forth from the womb, they find food prepared for them by his heavenly care. Indeed, this is in general true, provided what experience plainly demonstrates does not escape our eyes and senses, that some mothers have full and

⁵ “*Sophistae*.” The word is used by Calvin, in common with the other Reformers and with many Humanists, to designate the Scholastic writers when these are treated adversely.

⁶ Cf. I. xiii. 18, note 39, and Aquinas, *Summa Theol.* I. xix. 6: “An effect cannot possibly escape the order of the universal cause.”

⁷ Andreas Hyperius discusses this opinion adversely in his posthumously published *Methodus Theologiae* (Basel, 1568), pp. 232 ff., 252. Hyperius (1511–1564) was a Reformed scholar, and professor in Marburg.

abundant breasts, but others’ are almost dry, as God wills to feed one more liberally, but another more meagerly.

^{60d}Those who ascribe just praise to God’s omnipotence doubly benefit thereby. First, power ample enough to do good there is in him in whose possession are heaven and earth, and to whose beck all creatures are so attentive as to put themselves in obedience to him. Secondly, they may safely rest in the protection of him to whose will are subject all the harmful things which, whatever their source, we may fear; whose authority curbs Satan with all his furies and his whole equipage; and upon whose nod depends whatever opposes our welfare.^{60e} And we cannot otherwise correct or allay these uncontrolled and superstitious fears, which we repeatedly conceive at the onset of dangers. We are superstitiously timid, I say, if whenever creatures threaten us or forcibly terrorize us we become as fearful as if they had some intrinsic power to harm us, or might wound us inadvertently and accidentally, or there were not enough help in God against their harmful acts.

For example, the prophet forbids God’s children “to fear the stars and signs of heaven, as disbelievers commonly do” [Jer. 10:2 p.]. Surely he does not condemn every sort of fear. But when unbelievers transfer the government of the universe from God to the stars, they fancy that their bliss or their misery depends upon the decrees and indications of the stars, not upon God’s will; so it comes about that their fear is transferred from him, toward whom alone they ought to direct it, to stars and comets. Let him, therefore, who would beware of this infidelity ever remember that there is no erratic power, or action, or motion in creatures, but that they are governed by God’s secret plan in such a way that nothing happens except what is knowingly and willingly decreed by him.⁸

4. *The nature of providence*

^{61a}At the outset, then, let my readers grasp that providence means

⁸ This subject is treated by Calvin in relation to judicial astrology in *Averlismant contre l’astrologie judiciaire* (1549). (CR VII. 509–544, especially cols. 533, 523–533.) Cf. J. Bohatec, *Bude und Calvin*, pp. 270–280, where Calvin’s opinions on the religious bearings of judicial astrology are seen to be in agreement with those of Pico della Mirandola, the celebrated Christian Neoplatonist of Florence (d. 1494). On Pico’s opinion, see also L. Thorndike, *A History of Magic and Experimental Science* IV. 534 ff. Cf. the first sentence of this section, and the similar language in I. II. 2 and I. IV. 2.

not that by which God idly observes from heaven⁹ what takes place on earth, but that by which, as keeper of the keys, he governs all events. Thus it pertains no less to his hands than to his eyes. And indeed, when Abraham said to his son, "God will provide" [Gen. 22:8], he meant not only to assert God's foreknowledge of a future event, but to cast the care of a matter unknown to him upon the will of Him who is wont to give a way out of things perplexed and confused. Whence it follows that providence is lodged in the act; ¹⁰for many babble too ignorantly of bare foreknowledge. Not so crass is the error of those who attribute a governance to God, ¹¹but of a confused and mixed sort, as I have said, namely, one that by a general motion revolves and drives the system of the universe, with its several parts, but which does not specifically direct the action of individual creatures. Yet this error, also, is not tolerable; ¹²for by this providence which they call universal, they teach that nothing hinders all creatures from being contingently moved, or man from turning himself hither and thither by the free choice of his will. And they so apportion things between God and man that God by His power inspires in man a movement by which he can act in accordance with the nature implanted in him, but He regulates His own actions by the plan of His will. Briefly, they mean that the universe, men's affairs, and men themselves are governed by God's might but not by His determination. I say nothing of the Epicureans (a pestilence that has always filled the world) who imagine that God is idle and indolent; and others just as foolish, who of old fancied that God so ruled above the middle region of the air that he left the lower regions to fortune.¹³ As if the dumb creatures themselves do not sufficiently cry out against such patent madness!

("General" and "special" providence)

¹⁴For now I propose to refute the opinion (which almost universally obtains) that concedes to God some kind of blind and ambiguous motion, while taking from him the chief thing: that he directs everything by his incomprehensible wisdom and disposes it to his own end.¹⁵ And so in name only, not in fact, it makes God the Ruler of the universe because it deprives him of his control. What, I pray you, is it to have control but so to be in

⁹ Cf. I. ii. 2, note 7; I. iv. 2; Cicero, *Nature of the Gods* I. ii. 3; I. xvii. 45; I. xix. 51; I. xl. 111 (LCL. edition, pp. 4 f., 46 f., 50 f., 106 f.).

¹⁰ Piceto Pomponazzi's opinions may be alluded to here: cf. his *De fato, de libero arbitrio, et de praedestinatione* (1520) II. i, iv, v, cited by Barth and Niesel (OS III. 193) along with references to the thirteenth-century Averroists, Siger de Brabant and Boethius of Dacia, who denied the doctrine of providence.

authority that you rule in a determined order those things over which you are placed? Yet I do not wholly repudiate what is said concerning universal providence, provided they in turn grant me that the universe is ruled by God, not only because he watches over the order of nature set by himself, but because he exercises special care over each of his works. It is, indeed, true that the several kinds of things are moved by a secret impulse of nature, as if they obeyed God's eternal command, and what God has once determined flows on by itself.

¹⁶At this point we may refer to Christ's statement that from the very beginning he and the Father were always at work [John 5:17]; and to Paul's teaching that "in him we live, move, and have our being" [Acts 17:28]; also, what the author of The Letter to the Hebrews¹⁷ says, meaning to prove the divinity of Christ, that all things are sustained by his mighty command [Heb. 1:3]. But they wrongly conceal and obscure by this excuse that special providence which is so declared by sure and clear testimonies of Scripture that it is a wonder anyone can have doubts about it. And surely they who cast over it the veil of which I spoke are themselves compelled to add, by way of correction, that many things take place under God's especial care. But they wrongly restrict this to particular acts alone. Therefore we must prove God so attends to the regulation of individual events, and they all so proceed from his set plan, that nothing takes place by chance.

(Doctrine of special providence supported by the evidence of Scripture, 5-7)

5. God's providence also directs the individual

¹⁸Suppose we grant that the beginning of motion¹² is with God, but that all things, either of themselves or by chance, are borne whither inclination of nature impels. Then the alternation of days and nights, of winter and summer, will be God's work, inasmuch as he, assigning to each one his part, has set before them a certain law; that is, if with even tenor they uninterruptedly maintain the same way, days following after nights, months after months, and years after years. But that sometimes immoderate heat joined with dryness burns whatever crops there are, that at other times unseasonable rains damage the grain, that sudden calamity strikes from hail and storms—this will not be God's work, unless, perhaps because clouds or fair weather, cold or heat, take their origin

¹⁴ Note that Calvin distinguishes the author of Hebrews from Paul. Cf. Comm. Heb., "Argument," where he says, "The manner of teaching and the style sufficiently show that Paul was not the author."

¹⁵ Cf. I. xiii. 18, note 40.

from the conjunction of the stars and other natural causes. Yet in this way no place is left for God's fatherly favor, nor for his judgments. If they say that God is beneficent enough to mankind because he sheds upon heaven and earth an ordinary power, by which they are supplied with food, this is too weak and profane a fiction. As if the fruitfulness of one year were not a singular blessing of God, and scarcity and famine were not his curse and vengeance! But because it would take too long to collect all the reasons, let the authority of God himself suffice.⁶⁰ In the Law and in the Prophets he often declares that as often as he waters the earth with dews and rain [Lev. 26:3-4; Deut. 11:13-14; 28:12] he testifies to his favor; but when the heaven is hardened like iron at his command [Lev. 26:19], the grainfields consumed by a blight and other harmful things [Deut. 28:22], as often as the fields are struck with hail and storms [cf. Isa. 28:2; Hag. 2:18, Vg.; 2:17, EV, etc.], these are a sign of his certain and special vengeance. If we accept these things, it is certain that not one drop of rain falls without God's sure command.

Indeed, David praises God's general providence, that he gives food to the young of the ravens which call upon him [Ps. 147:9; cf. Ps. 146:9, Vg.]; but when God himself threatens the animals with famine, does he not sufficiently declare that he feeds all living things sometimes with a meager, at other times with a fuller, portion as seems best? It is childish, as I have already said, to restrict this to particular acts, since Christ says, without exception, that not even a tiny and insignificant sparrow falls to the ground without the Father's will [Mat. 10:29].⁶¹ Surely if the flight of birds is governed by God's definite plan, we must confess with the prophet that he so dwells on high as to humble himself to behold whatever happens in heaven and on earth [Ps. 113:5-6].

6. *God's providence especially relates to men*

But because we know that the universe was established especially for the sake of mankind,¹² we ought to look for this purpose in his governance also. The prophet Jeremiah exclaims, "I know, O Lord, that the way of man is not his own, nor is it given to man to direct his own steps" [Jer. 10:23, cf. Vg.]. Moreover, Solomon says, "Man's steps are from the Lord [Prov. 20:24 P.] and how may man dispose his way?" [Prov. 16:9 P., cf. Vg.]. Let them now say that man is moved by God according to the inclination of his nature, but that he himself turns that motion whither he pleases. Nay, if that were truly said, the free choice of his ways would be in man's control. Perhaps they will deny this because he can do

¹² Cf. I. xiv. 22, note 32.

nothing without God's power. Yet they cannot really get by with that, since it is clear that the prophet and Solomon ascribe to God not only might but also choice and determination. Elsewhere Solomon elegantly rebukes this rashness of men, who set up for themselves a goal without regard to God, as if they were not led by his hand. "The disposition of the heart is man's, but the preparation of the tongue is the Lord's." [Prov. 16:1, 9, conflated.] It is an absurd folly that miserable men take it upon themselves to act without God, when they cannot even speak except as he wills!

Indeed, Scripture, to express more plainly that nothing at all in the world is undertaken without his determination, shows that things seemingly most fortuitous are subject to him. For what can you attribute more to chance than when a branch breaking off from a tree kills a passing traveler? But the Lord speaks far differently, acknowledging that he has delivered him to the hand of the slayer [Ex. 21:13]. Likewise, who does not attribute lots to the blindness of fortune? But the Lord does not allow this, claiming for himself the determining of them. He teaches that it is not by their own power that pebbles are cast into the lap and drawn out, but the one thing that could have been attributed to chance he testifies to come from himself [Prov. 16:33].⁶² In the same vein is that saying of Solomon, "The poor man and the usurer meet together; God illumines the eyes of both" [Prov. 29:13; cf. ch. 28:3]. He points out that, even though the rich are mingled with the poor in the world, while to each his condition is divinely assigned, God, who lights all men, is not at all blind. And so he urges the poor to patience; because those who are not content with their own lot try to shake off the burden laid upon them by God. Thus, also, another prophet rebukes the impious who ascribe to men's toil, or to fortune, the fact that some lie in squalor and others rise up to honors. "For not from the east, nor from the west, nor from the wilderness comes lifting up; because God is judge, he humbles one and lifts up another." [Ps. 75:6-7.] Because God cannot put off the office of judge, hence he reasons that it is by His secret plan that some distinguish themselves, while others remain contemptible.

7. *God's providence also regulates "natural" occurrences*

Also, I say that particular events are generally testimonies of the character of God's singular providence. In the desert God stirred up the south wind, which brought to the people an abundance of birds. [Ex. 16:13; Num. 11:31.] When he would have Jonah cast into the sea, God sent a wind by stirring up a

whirlwind [Jonah 1:4]. Those who do not think that God controls the government of the universe will say that this was outside the common course. Yet from it I infer that no wind ever arises or increases except by God's express command. Otherwise it would not be true that he makes the winds his messengers and the flaming fire his ministers, that he makes the clouds his chariots and rides upon the wings of the wind [Ps. 104:3-4; cf. Ps. 103:3-4, Vg.], unless by his decision he drove both clouds and winds about, and showed in them the singular presence of his power. So, also, we are elsewhere taught that whenever the sea boils up with the blast of winds those forces witness to the singular presence of God. "He commands and raises the stormy wind which lifts on high the waves of the sea" [Ps. 107:25; cf. Ps. 106:25, Vg.]; "then he causes the storm to become calm, so that the waves cease for the sailors" [Ps. 107:29]; just as elsewhere he declares that he "has scourged the people with burning winds" [Amos 4:9, cf. Vg.].

So too, although the power to procreate is naturally implanted in men, yet God would have it accounted to his special favor that he leaves some in barrenness, but grants others with offspring [cf. Ps. 113:9]; "For the fruit of the womb is his gift" [Ps. 127:3 P.]. For this reason, Jacob said to his wife, "Am I God that I can give you children?" [Gen. 30:2 P.]. To end this at once: there is nothing more ordinary in nature than for us to be nourished by bread.¹⁰ Yet the Spirit declares not only that the produce of the earth is God's special gift but that "men do not live by bread alone" [Deut. 8:3; Matt. 4:4]; because it is not plenty itself that nourishes men, but God's secret blessing;¹¹ just as conversely he threatens that he is going to "take away the stay of bread" [Isa. 3:1]. And indeed, that earnest prayer for daily bread [Matt. 6:11] could be understood only in the sense that God furnishes us with food by his fatherly hand. For this reason, the prophet, to persuade believers that God in feeding them fulfills the office of the best of all fathers of families, states that he gives food to all flesh [Ps. 136:25; cf. Ps. 135:25, Vg.]. Finally, when we hear on the one side, "The eyes of the Lord are upon the righteous and his ears toward their prayers" [Ps. 34:15], but on the other, "The eye of the Lord is upon the impious, to destroy their memory from the earth" [Ps. 34:16 P.], let us know that all creatures above and below are ready to obey, that he may apply them to any use he pleases. From this we gather that his general providence not only flourishes among creatures so

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as to continue the order of nature, but is by his wonderful plan adapted to a definite and proper end.

(Discussion of fortune, chance, and seeming contingency in events, 8-9)

8. *The doctrine of providence is no Stoic belief in fate!*
Those who wish to cast odium upon this doctrine defame it as the Stoics' dogma of fate. This charge was once hurled at Augustine.¹² Even though we are unwilling to quarrel over words, yet we do not admit the word "fate," both because it is one of those words whose profane novelties Paul teaches us to avoid [1 Tim. 6:20], and because men try by the odium it incurs to oppress this very dogma. We do not, with the Stoics, contrive a necessity of causes, which is contained in nature; but we make God the ruler and governor of all things, who in accordance with his wisdom has from the farthest limit of eternity decreed what he was going to do, and now by his might carries out what he has decreed. From this we declare that not only heaven and earth and the inanimate creatures, but also the plans and intentions of men, are so governed by his providence that they are borne by it straight to their appointed end.

What then? you will ask. Does nothing happen by chance, nothing by contingency? I reply: Basil the Great has truly said that "fortune" and "chance" are pagan terms, with whose significance the minds of the godly ought not to be occupied.¹³ For if every success is God's blessing, and calamity and adversity his curse, no place now remains in human affairs for fortune or chance. And that saying of Augustine also ought to impress us: "It grieves me that in my books *Against the Academics* I have so often mentioned Fortune; although I did not mean some goddess or other to be understood by this name, but only a fortuitous outcome of things in outward good or evil."¹⁴ From *fortuna* also come those words which we should have no scruple about using: *forte, forsan, forsitan, fortasse, fortuito* [happily, perchance, maybe, perhaps, fortuitously]; which nevertheless must be wholly referred to divine providence. And I did not pass over this in silence but said it, for perhaps what is commonly called 'fortune'

¹⁰ Augustine, *Against Two Letters of the Pelagians* II. v. 10-vi. 12 (MPL 44: 577 ff.; tr. NPNF V. 398 ff.).

¹¹ Basil, *Homilies on the Psalms*, Ps. 32:4 (MPG 29, 399 f.).

¹² Augustine, *Retractions* I. i. 2 (MPL 32, 585); *Against the Academics* I. i. iii. ii. 2-4 (MPL 32, 905, 935 ff.; tr. ACW XII. 35 f., 98-101).

¹³ Cf. III. xx. 44.

is also ruled by a secret order, and we call a 'chance occurrence' only that of which the reason and cause are secret. Indeed, I said this: but I regret having thus mentioned 'fortune' here, since I see that men have a very bad custom, that where one ought to say 'God willed this,' they say, 'fortune willed this.'¹⁷ In fine, Augustine commonly teaches that if anything is left to fortune, the world is aimlessly whirled about. And although in another place he lays down that all things are carried on partly by man's free choice, partly by God's providence, yet a little after this he sufficiently demonstrates that men are under, and ruled by, providence; taking as his principle that nothing is more absurd than that anything should happen without God's ordaining it, because it would then happen without any cause. For this reason he excludes, also, the contingency that depends upon men's will; soon thereafter he does so more clearly, denying that we ought to seek the cause of God's will. How the term "permission," so frequently mentioned by him, ought to be understood will best appear from one passage, where he proves that God's will is the highest and first cause of all things because nothing happens except from his command or permission.¹⁸ Surely he does not conjure up a God who reposes idly in a watchtower, willing the while to permit something or other, when an actual will not his own, so to speak, intervenes, which otherwise could not be deemed a cause.

9. *The true causes of events are hidden to us*

^aYet since the sluggishness of our mind lies far beneath the height of God's providence, we must employ a distinction to lift it up. ^bTherefore I shall put it this way: however all things may be ordained by God's plan, according to a sure dispensation, for us they are fortuitous. Not that we think that fortune rules the world and men, tumbling all things at random up and down, for it is fitting that this folly be absent from the Christian's breast! But since the order, reason, end, and necessity of those things which happen for the most part lie hidden in God's purpose, and are not apprehended by human opinion, those things, which it is certain take place by God's will, are in a sense fortuitous. For they bear on the face of them no other appearance, whether they are considered in their own nature or weighed according to our knowledge and judgment. Let us imagine, for example, a merchant who, entering a wood with a company of faithful men, unwisely wanders away from his companions, and in

¹⁷ Augustine, *De diversis quaestionibus*, qu. 24, 27, 28 (MPL 40. 17 f.); *On the Trinity* III. iv. 9 (MPL 42. 873; tr. NPNF III. 58 f.).

his wandering comes upon a robber's den, falls among thieves, and is slain. His death was not only foreseen by God's eye, but also determined by his decree. For it is not said that he foresaw how long the life of each man would extend, but that he determined and fixed the bounds that men cannot pass [Job 14:5]. Yet as far as the capacity of our mind is concerned, all things therein seem fortuitous. What will a Christian think at this point? Just this: whatever happened in a death of this sort he will regard as fortuitous by nature, as it is; yet he will not doubt that God's providence exercised authority over fortune in directing its end. The same reckoning applies to the contingency of future events.¹⁹ As all future events are uncertain to us, so we hold them in suspense, as if they might incline to one side or the other. Yet in our hearts it nonetheless remains fixed that nothing will take place that the Lo. d has not previously foreseen.

^aIn this sense the term "fate" is often repeated in Ecclesiastes [chs. 2:14-15; 3:19; 9:2-3, 11],²⁰ because at first glance men do not penetrate to the first cause, which is deeply hidden. And yet what is set forth in Scripture concerning God's secret providence was never so extinguished from men's hearts without some sparks always glowing in the darkness. Thus the soothsayers of the Philistines, although they wavered in doubt, yet attributed their adverse fate partly to God, partly to fortune. If the Ark, they say, shall pass through that way, we shall know that it is God who has struck us; but if it passes through another way, then it has happened to us by chance [1 Sam. 6:9]. Foolishly indeed, where their divination deceived them, they took refuge in fortune. Meanwhile we see them constrained from daring to think simply fortuitous what had happened unfavorably to them. But how God by the bridle of his providence turns every event whatever way he wills, will be clear from this remarkable example. At the very moment of time in which David was trapped in the wilderness of Maon, the Philistines invaded the land, and Saul was compelled to depart [1 Sam. 23:26-27]. If God, intending to provide for his servant's safety, cast this hindrance in Saul's way, surely, although the Philistines took up arms suddenly and above all human expectation, yet we will not say that this took place by

¹⁹ Cf. Comm. Harmony of the Evangelists, Matt. 10:29. Calvin holds all contingency within the operation of God's providence. So also Westminster Confession V. 2: "... by the same providence, he ordereth ... [all things] to fall out according to the nature of second causes, either necessarily, freely, or contingently." See the quoted statements on contingent events by Reformed theologians in Heppel RD, ch. xii, pp. 265 ff.

²⁰ "Eventus."

chance; but what for us seems a contingency, faith recognizes to have been a secret impulse from God.

Not always does a like reason appear, but we ought undoubtedly to hold that whatever changes are discerned in the world are produced from the secret stirring of God's hand. But what God has determined must necessarily so take place, even though it is neither unconditionally, nor of its own peculiar nature, necessary. A familiar example presents itself in the bones of Christ. When he took upon himself a body like our own, no sane man will deny that his bones were fragile; yet it was impossible to break them [John 19:33, 36]. Whence again we see that distinctions concerning relative necessity and absolute necessity, likewise of consequent and consequence,²¹ were not recklessly invented in schools, when God subjected to fragility the bones of his Son, which he had exempted from being broken, and thus restricted to the necessity of his own plan what could have happened naturally.

CHAPTER XVII

HOW WE MAY APPLY THIS DOCTRINE TO OUR GREATEST BENEFIT

(Interpretation of divine providence with reference to the past and the future, 1-5)

1. The meaning of God's ways

Moreover, as men's dispositions are inclined to vain subtleties, any who do not hold fast to a good and right use of this doctrine can hardly avoid entangling themselves in inscrutable difficulties. Therefore it is expedient here to discuss briefly to what end Scripture teaches that all things are divinely ordained.

Three things, indeed, are to be noted. First, God's providence must be considered with regard to the future as well as the past. Secondly, it is the determinative principle of all things in such a way that sometimes it works through an intermediary, sometimes without an intermediary, sometimes contrary to every intermediary. Finally, it strives to the end that God may reveal his concern for the whole human race, but especially his vigilance in ruling the church, which he deigns to watch more closely. Now this, also, ought to be added, that although either fatherly favor

²¹ Aquinas, *Summa Theol.* I. xix. 3. Barth and Niesel, citing Bonaventura, Duns Scotus, Erasmus, and Eck in agreement, point out Luther's rejection of this view in his *De servo arbitrio* (*Werke* WA XVIII. 615 ff.). Melancthon's position is not different from that of Aquinas and of Calvin: *Loci communes*, 1543 (CR Melancthon XXI. 649 f.); *Loci theologici*, 1559 (ed. Engelland, *op. cit.*, pp. 229 f., 233).