Divine Action and Divine Transcendence

with Christopher C. Knight, "Theistic Naturalism and 'Special' Divine Providence"; Robert Larmer, "Divine Agency and the Principle of the Conservation of Energy"; Edward M. Hogan, "John Polkinghorne and Bernard Lonergan on the Scientific Status of Theology"; and Daniel P. Wisniewski, "Love in the 'Unidiverse': A Salesian Perspective on Chance"

LOVE IN THE "UNIDIVERSE": A SALESIAN PERSPECTIVE ON CHANCE

by Daniel P. Wisniewski, O.S.F.S.

Abstract. The notion of the universe evolving through an interplay of law and chance raises numerous theological questions. In particular, scientific evidence of chance confronts images of God and divine action within this emerging worldview. To interpret Christian faith within a scientific world, figures from church tradition are drawn into the conversation, and a particular spirituality is appropriated to highlight the relationship between science and religion. The personal, practical, accessible spirituality of Saint Francis de Sales is retrieved for the discussion. This Christian humanist recognized the love of God as paramount to a human-divine relationship. The themes of divine providence and the will of God illustrate a spirituality of the heart that provides relevant insights into the theological implications of chance. An overview of how the reality of chance has posed numerous questions is considered before drawing on the spirituality of de Sales. Various theological views on chance are presented. As Salesian thought enhances an understanding of divine action in a world of chance, contemporary theologies of chance provide a framework for understanding the teachings of the saint in a new way.

Keywords: chance; Christian humanism; Francis de Sales; human-divine relationship; love of God; natural providence; natural theology; relationship between religion and science; Salesian spirituality; signified will of God; supernatural providence; theology of nature; unidiverse; will of God's good pleasure

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Studies on the relationship between science and religion continue to gain increasing interest, and in particular the picture of our universe as evolving through an interplay of law and chance has raised numerous theological questions. The scientific evidence of chance in biological evolution, quantum physics, and dynamical systems specifically confront images of God and divine action within this emerging worldview. To interpret the Christian faith within a scientific world, figures from church tradition such as Irenaeus (Peters 1997) and Bonaventure (Edwards 1997; Delio 1998; Hayes 1997) have been drawn into the conversation. The aim of this article lies within this trend of appropriating the spirituality of a religious figure to highlight the relationship between science and religion. The spirituality of Saint Francis de Sales (1567–1622), which is personal, practical, and accessible, is a piece of this tradition that has not extensively been retrieved for this discussion. Centered on the love relationship between the human and the divine, the saint's spirituality offers a unique contribution. In Salesian spirituality,[1] the themes of divine providence and the will of God illustrate this human-divine process in a way that resonates with the current interaction between the sciences and theology on the issue of chance. Because of his support of scientific pursuits in his own day and the implications of love as his guiding principle, Francis de Sales is someone from whom we can gain insights about God in a world of "chance."

Chance: A Change in the Scientific Worldview

Science in the twentieth century progressed beyond a Newtonian mechanistic understanding of the universe, which was compared to a clockwork mechanism by Robert Boyle (and elaborated by William Paley) in the eighteenth century (Davies 1992, 201). Such a model assumed an ultimate determinism in the world as discovered in physics, mathematics, biology, and even behavioristic psychology; causal relationships were the reason for all actions. In light of this scientific setting, interpretations of the divine within natural processes "assumed God's complete control of all events, allowing no loopholes for the intrusion of lesser wills or ultimately accidental occurrences" (Schilling 1991, 366). However, this apparently secure and solid image of the relationship between God and the world soon lost its foundation when uncertainties and indeterminism were found in scientific research.

Although reasonably deterministic and ordered at the macro level, various fields of science have discovered that at the micro, or infinitesimal, level chance is at work more than previously thought. Two scientific developments, Darwinism and quantum theory, reveal the interplay between law and chance and consequently "undermine the idea that there is a detailed blueprint or unfolding plan according to which the world was designed and now operates" (Johnson 1996, 7). A designer or clockmaker

God no longer fits the natural drama described by science. In the early 1970s, French biologist Jacques Monod, in his famous work *Chance and Necessity*, wrote of his conviction that *all* biological processes were rooted in blind chance. After describing the causes for genetic mutations, he professed that "chance *alone* is at the source of every innovation, of all creation in the biosphere." Pure chance, "absolutely free but blind," is the "*sole* conceivable hypothesis" for evolution (1971, 112–13).

Since then, scholars have challenged Monod's understanding of chance and its atheistic implications. David J. Bartholomew, in his work *God of Chance*, states, "The notion of chance arises whenever a situation exists in which there is more than one possible outcome for an event, and where one cannot predict, with certainty, which outcome will occur." This implies that either human ignorance prohibits recognizing the causes or there is such a thing as pure chance, "for which no causal explanation can be conceived of in the present state of knowledge" (1984, 66–68). Albert Einstein believed in the former. Confronted with unpredictability in quantum theory, he refused to believe "that God plays dice with the world" (Frank 1953, 208, 285). He did not agree with an abandonment of determinism: "The weakness of the theory lies . . . in the fact . . . that it leaves the duration and direction of the elementary processes to 'chance'" (Jammer 1999, 222, quoting Einstein). Given time, the physicist believed, a theory of matter could be constructed with no uncertainty. However, as Heisenberg's Uncertainty Principle demonstrated, there exists a fundamental indeterminacy in nature at all levels that no amount of further knowledge can eradicate.

Complex dynamical systems lend important insights to the discussion of chance. The unpredictability intrinsic to such systems is manifested with sensitivity to the circumstances of a system's environment. For example, in weather prediction, the "butterfly effect" shows how the sensitivity of initial conditions can have tremendous effects on the macro level (Gleick 1987, 8, 20–23). In his book *Science and Providence* John Polkinghorne offers the example of the behavior of gas molecules as comparable to the sensitivity found in successive collisions of billiard balls. For each impact, measurable data from details such as the angle of incidence include small uncertainties that "rapidly accumulate to produce exponentially diverging consequences" (1989, 28). Thus, physical processes are open to a flexibility which the predictable descriptions made formerly are but a mere approximation. For this reason, a strict reductionist approach to understanding the natural world must give way to freedom and openness to the future. In the universe there is interplay between law and chance, regularity and evolving, being and becoming. It is in the becoming that chance provides variety not discerned from the past and present.

At times, chance events demonstrate the interesting quality of regularity arising from random processes. Such patterns of order are not recognized

in individual events at the micro level; rather, over time, the combination of similar events yields what we classify as natural "laws" that approximate such behavior. For this reason we have statistical laws of nature that "are simply *descriptions of patterns* in aggregate behavior which are explicable in terms of underlying processes" (Bartholomew 1984, 128; emphasis added). At the macro level, science studies these observed patterns.

In the study of thermodynamics, Ilya Prigogine and his colleagues discovered "a class of open systems, 'dissipative systems,' which can maintain themselves in an ordered, steady state far from equilibrium" (Peacocke 1986, 63). The emergence of life as the end result was inevitable; however, the form it took was open and unpredictable. Prigogine's dissipative systems demonstrate a "primordial cosmic impulse" whereby order in our natural world occurs via chance (Haught 1995, 66). Ian Barbour believes such evolution suggests that a new understanding of design must be considered, one that "postulates a general direction but no detailed plan" (2000, 113). Robert Wright (2000, 5, 337–43) suggests that this direction toward greater complexity is propagated by nonzero sums, a concept from game theory that describes win-win or lose-lose outcomes in evolutionary processes such as natural selection. The long-range strategy of design may be organized and predictable, but the short-range opportunities are more random, based on feedback and adjustment to conditions. Within this vision, creation is not designed in the past but is an activity that demands continuing governance (*creatio continua*).

Thus, a true interplay between law and chance exists in natural processes. Chance is how law is creative (Johnson 1996, 8). Arthur Peacocke describes why mutual exclusivity could not be possible: "A universe under the iron-grip of a law-like determinism at both the micro- and the macro-levels would simply repeat all its past patterns and not allow the formation of new ones; whereas a universe in which randomness alone reigned would not contain any recognizable, enduring forms at all and could scarcely be a 'cosmos'" (1986, 97 n. 18). Elsewhere he states that processes, seen as chance working within a "given" framework (law/necessity), are "an eliciting of the potentialities that the physical cosmos possessed *ab initio*" that are "actualized by the operation of 'chance' stimulating their coming into existence" (1998, 363).

Science presents chance as a reality in its experimentation, data, and theories. However, what about a God who created the world in a fashion that reflects purpose and design? A natural theology[2] based on observable design and order in the universe must now reconsider what the scientific world may contribute to our understanding of God. Although Polkinghorne (in concert with Barbour) notes that natural theology, which relies on the pattern and structure of the world, can never lead us to the Christian God, a personal and caring God, Bartholomew uses the approach of natural theology to reconcile the new science with theology. Admitting

that natural theology is hazardous and out of favor, the mathematician considers a "more modest" aim: "what view of [God's] nature is consistent with our scientific knowledge?" In order to answer this question, Bartholomew lays some foundations on which to continue his search for synthesis between God and chance. First, chance must be accepted as real and fundamental to nature. Second, the sense made of scripture "must not diminish God by assigning to him attributes which limit his power or compromise his nature revealed as *love*" (1984, 93–94; emphasis added). In this arena of God's relation to a world of chance, Salesian spirituality makes a unique contribution to current discussions, to a theology of nature.[3]

Salesian Spirituality

The spirituality of Francis de Sales, Savoyard and Bishop of Geneva, is given in his ever-popular *Introduction to the Devout Life*, which encapsulates the universal call to love God and neighbor. His instruction in the book is especially directed to those living in the world: "those who live in town, within families, or at the court, and by their state in life are obliged to live an ordinary life as to outward appearances" ([1609] 1966, 33). His *Treatise on the Love of God* ([1616] 1963), intended for those continuing in their life of devotion, is "a compendium of the whole spiritual life, both in theory and in practice, a biography of charity" (Smith 1967, 41).

De Sales is considered a great Christian humanist. A powerful intellectual current emerging from the sixteenth century, Christian humanism "places great store in the capacities of humankind in the religious enterprise" (Wright 1996, 158). For de Sales, the love of God is the center of one's life; however, it is the human capacity of free choice that allows one to respond to that love. Such optimism in the saint's concept of God is a result of his crisis in Paris during 1586–87, when he was eighteen years old. He was deeply troubled by the problem of predestination, a common concern during his time, and questioned whether he was saved or damned, whether God saved some and not others. He faced a dilemma: How could he love God, from whom he had felt so much love since his childhood, and be condemned to hell (of which he was convinced)? The tension between God's grace and human liberty came to a resolution when Francis abandoned himself to God and at the same time realized that he had the freedom of choice to love in the present moment. On the basis of 1 Timothy 2:4, de Sales embraced a view that God intended all humankind to be saved[4] and optimistically viewed human capacities as God-given gifts, the medium through which we respond to God (Wright 1996, 158, 161).

For de Sales, everything is viewed in terms of love; "the love of God defines human nature" (Buckley 1989, 40). Therefore, when God breathes life into the human being, it is the breath of love: "as Adam's body was when God with his almighty hand 'formed it out of the slime of the earth' . . . it would be a body without movement, without life, and without beauty

until God breathed into it 'the breath of life,' that is, holy charity" ([1616] 1963, 2:222). Living and loving are integrally connected at the moment of creation because "love is the most creative power in the universe." Hence, God the Lover, not God the Creator, is the primary image for de Sales (Pocetto 1960, 46). Love, the image and likeness of the Creator, is the great orderer: "in man all things must be set in order by love and for love" (de Sales [1616] 1963, 1:66). The human person therefore reveals the love of God through his or her own loving. Here we catch a glimpse of co-creativity. Although the love revealed is really God's love, we are the ones who choose to express it. For this reason, the commandment to love God and neighbor is paramount for de Sales.

This relationship of love between God and the human person is described using the image of the heart, "a wholistic and diffuse image that in Salesian use conveys a sense of the central and ultimate dynamic of both the human person and of God." The hearts of humanity and the heart of God are interconnected in life, both earthly and spiritual. Love, which is identified with God and whose source is the divine heart, "the womb of that love," is both a means and an end, as love draws us deeper into the mystery of the divine who is love (Wright 1990, 143–44, 146). This process of an "unfolding sacred presence" of heart speaking to heart expresses all aspects of living—beauty and delight, suffering and death. It is most intimately given in the transforming example of the gentle and humble heart of Jesus (a hallmark of Salesian spirituality based on Matthew 11:29).

As an act of God's benevolent love, "the world was created by the spirit of liberty and . . . has been touched by the breath of freedom" (Pocetto 1960, 47). Thus, free will, the human capacity to choose, is an integral part of humanity. By it, we cooperate with God. The one with a free will also possesses the ability to reason: "We are men solely because we possess reason" (de Sales [1609] 1966, 215). The human person is defined by both the inclination to love God above all things and the natural light of reason (Buckley 1989, 40). Love of the heart is "a fountain that pours its waters of reason out over the whole person" (Wright 1990, 145). The bishop-saint believes that the incarnation of Jesus teaches us how to be more human, "to live no longer like brute animals, as people did after Adam's fall, but with and according to reason" (de Sales 1987, 76). For de Sales, the use of reason cannot be understood apart from love. In his *Treatise* he describes how we are naturally inclined to love, yet, depraved by sin, human nature does not allow us to easily engage in this act of loving. The mind, however, is less affected by sin: "Sin has weakened the human will far more than it has darkened the intellect" ([1616] 1963, 1:94–95). Alexander Pocetto calls God's benevolent love our "natural" habitat: "we have a natural tendency to love God above all things, and we have been created in, by and for love" (1989, 211). Dwelling in this natural habitat, reason has a role to play. Love and reason go hand in hand.

As a lover of education, the Christian humanist used all that enriched the human person's understanding. In particular, his use of the arts and sciences served his spiritual life. However, like his contemporaries, his thought was within a medieval cosmology whose "universe is a perfect, immutable, hierarchical, and anthropocentric order" (Wildiers 1982, 58). The cosmos was the ordered design of God, a concept de Sales reflected when he compared the universe to a clock, a "whole created machine" ([1616] 1963, 1:224). He concurred with the Scotistic school of thought that at the center of God's plan is the Incarnation of the Word, the only one able to restore true order. "Christ is the beginning and the end of the divine plan" (Müller 1984, 24–26; de Sales 1892–1964, 1:114–15), a plan that is revealed in what de Sales calls the "unidiverse."

> This supreme unity of the divine act is opposed to confusion and disorder but not to distinction and variety. On the contrary, it employs these last to bring forth beauty by reducing all difference and diversity to proportion, proportion to order, and order to the unity of the world, which comprises all created things, both visible and invisible. All these together are called the universe, perhaps because all their diversity is reduced to unity, as if one were to say "unidiverse," that is, unique and diverse, unique along with diversity, and diverse along with unity. ([1616] 1963, 1:106)

By "unidiverse" the bishop illustrates how the ordering of all creation incorporates the many into one by binding every individual element of creation with the rest in beautiful harmony. It is interesting that his concept of beauty in creation is marked by "proportion" and "order." Yet, perhaps what he perceived as diverse he classified as in "proportion," which can be recognized and comprehended only by God whose thoughts and mysteries are incomprehensible to the human intellect (Müller 1984, 22–23). Thus, no disorder or indeterminacy would exist for de Sales.

Although he views the universe as "a book containing God's word, but in a language that not every man understands" ([1626] 1964, 39), de Sales sees no incongruity between faith and reason. The two are "daughters of the same Father. . . . They can and must live together as very affectionate sisters" (1892–1964, 1:330; Pocetto 1989, 209). Thomas Smith rightfully states that for the saint, "knowledge, science, learning are Christian values of the first order" (1967, 86). De Sales incorporated his desire to learn in both his spiritual works and his own life. Evidence of his support of education, particularly that of science, includes the dedication of his body to science in 1590[5] and the creation of the *Académie florimontane* in 1606.[6] More important, his support and defense of the scientific writings of Redento Baranzano (b. 1590), a Barnabite priest who taught at the Cappuisien College in Annecy, demonstrate his agreement with Baranzano's position on the autonomy of science.[7]

Anthony Levi encapsulates the Salesian position: "There could be no conflict between science and religion, and no reason to fear the conclusions

of empirical scientific investigation" (1994, 796). At the same time, however, de Sales' support of the *autonomy* of science contains no apparent suggestion of dialogue in the contemporary sense.[8] André Ravier considers de Sales' role in Baranzano's publications as an inspiration to Christian scientists who want to be faithful to both aspects of their "double vocation"—their scientific research and their Christian faith (1994, 299). In fact, on closer inspection of both contemporary science and theology, de Sales' Christian humanism and spirituality more generally resonate with present-day efforts toward constructive engagement between theology and the sciences. This resonance becomes especially clear as we examine the Salesian themes of divine providence and the will of God, keeping in mind the role of chance in the worldview of modern science.

Divine Providence

When considering the worldview within which de Sales' thought and teachings developed, divine providence is of central importance. Understood as "God's continual care for his creation and his involvement in its affairs" (Bartholomew 1984, 119), divine providence must be examined in order to see the relevance of de Sales' theology to present-day discussions and to understand how to account for indeterminacy and chance occurrences that do not follow a lawful order.

De Sales devotes several chapters of his *Treatise* to describing divine providence and how and why this reality of God is evident in the daily events of life. What we perceive as a variety of actions performed by God are but one single act, which is God's own divinity. The singularity of God's word produces diversity among things. Because God's word is permanent and unchanging, "it produces all changes that are good," and because it is eternal, "it gives to all things their succession, changes, order, rank, and season. . . . God, like the printer, has given existence to all the different creatures which have been, are, and shall be, by one single stroke of his all-powerful will" ([1616] 1963, 1:104–6). Important in this quotation is de Sales' understanding that the single stroke of creation took into account not just a past time and place but all time—past, present, and future. However, for him, this is not a Deist God, a designer who ordered creation, set it in motion, and then stood back and watched. Divine providence includes God's loving care and guidance.

De Sales uses the story of King Solomon's reign and his well-ordered plan and construction of the temple. The plan, but more importantly the creation and good governance of Solomon, are considered his providence, especially given that he governed well (providently). Likewise, God eternally knows the art of creating the world for God's glory. "Hence, . . . supreme providence is nothing else than that act by which God wills to furnish men and angels with the means necessary or useful for attaining their end"—

giving glory to God ([1616] 1963, 1:109). De Sales makes a distinction between natural providence and supernatural providence based on the difference in their means to attain this same end. The former is "how God's desire to save all is concretized and made available to each person in light of his or her creation" (Fiorelli 1989, 95); this is accomplished through the plethora of natural means we find in the universe. De Sales describes supernatural providence within his understanding of the incarnation of Jesus, for whom all things have been made: "Out of the sum of the countless number of beings he could produce he chose to create men and angels to have company with his Son, to participate in his grace and glory, and to adore and praise him forevermore" ([1616] 1963, 1:109, 111–12).

Divine providence "reaches all things" ([1616] 1963, 1:109). Whether through natural or supernatural providence, God chose to create, decided to unite with the created nature in the person of Jesus, and for his sake chose to create all else, including both the fortuitous and the unexpected (Smith 1967, 64–65). However, events are deemed fortuitous or unexpected only by human standards. Although we may not recognize it, divine providence "foresees them and directs them to the general good of the universe" (de Sales [1616] 1963, 1:109). Here is a glimpse of de Sales' rationale with regard to chance events:

> Such accidents take place by the concurrence of various causes. Since they have no natural alliance with one another, each of them produces its own particular effect, but in such manner that from their meeting there issues another effect of a different nature. Although one could not foresee it, all these different causes contribute to that effect. ([1616] 1963, 1:110)

He illustrates this by telling the story of Aeschylus the poet, who was killed by the blow of a tortoise shell. Superstitious of being killed by a falling house, Aeschylus spent his days in an open field. A falcon, mistaking his bald head for a rock, dropped a tortoise shell on him in order to break it open for consumption. De Sales classifies this as a "chance event" insofar as neither the poet nor the falcon expected death as an outcome; however, it occurred by God's providence in order to punish the poet's superstition.

Another illustration de Sales uses is the story of Joseph and his brothers (Genesis 45:8–50:20). He states that terrible things, such as the evil intentions of Joseph's brothers, are God's design. Even a monstrosity "makes us more highly esteem complete and perfect works, arouses us to wonder, and provokes us to philosophize and to have many good thoughts. In a word, they have a place in the world like shadows in a picture which give grace to it and seem to lighten up the painting" ([1616] 1963, 1:110). Thus, the saint would accept the reality of chance occurring in the natural world, yet such particular happenings are within God's providence, understood as God's plan of love.

Will of God

Linked to the concept of divine providence is de Sales' understanding of the will of God. He distinguishes between the "two wills of God": the "signified will of God" and the "will of God's good pleasure" (discussed in his *Treatise*, Books Eight and Nine). In conformity with the unity of God, he sees only one will of God; however, "he saw God's essence so transcending human capacity that it could not be known in its simple unity" (Wright and Power 1988, 40). God is revealed through the divine will, known in a variety of ways by the human person. In Salesian terminology, God reveals by both the signified will and the will of good pleasure.

The signified will of God is revealed to us through words, as in Christian doctrine, and is proposed to us in advance by God to our own free will (Power 1994, 267). This is the will *to be done*. Based on knowledge about God's will given to us in scripture, church teaching, devotional literature, prayer, and spiritual direction, we discern through our own liberty, via judgments and movements of the heart, which life choices to make. In this way, de Sales considers the human person to be "a co-creator of God's will under these circumstances" (Wright and Power 1988, 41). The person, through "love of conformity," aligns oneself to this revealed will of God.

The will of God's good pleasure is God's will *done.* It happens independently of human consent (Wright and Power 1988, 42). Whereas the former is revealed through words, the latter is revealed through events; the will of God is not discerned until after the event has happened. De Sales boldly states, "Sin excepted, nothing is done except by what is called God's absolute will or the will of good pleasure. No one can block this will. It is known to us only by its effects. When they are accomplished, they make clear to us the fact that God has willed and planned them." This is reminiscent of his view of divine providence. He notes that "love of submission," our response to the will of God's good pleasure, is most recognized in tribulations. From the hand of God, sufferings and afflictions should also be embraced and loved ([1616] 1963, 2:97, 99–100).

Salesian scholars Wendy Wright and Joseph Power note that "good pleasure" is misleading and that the saint probably based it on Matthew 11:26. They elaborate as follows: "The bishop does not mean to imply that God *causes* all events and existing realities but that whatever *is* is in some way within God's providence; it is not outside of the loving embrace of the creative and redemptive process" (1988, 42 n. 4, 43). In this sense, divine providence is widened to exhibit the creativity of God being unfolded within a "process" whose every occurrence is directed by the hand of God. This is certainly the case for the human person's role as co-creator, as discussed above with regard to the signified will of God.

Thus, this is a human-divine process whereby humanity must "live courageously between the one will of God and the other" (de Sales [1616]

1963, 2:116). A Christian humanist, de Sales takes seriously the human faculty of choosing within this process. He outlines a short method for knowing the signified will of God: "After we have implored the light of the Holy Spirit, applied our thought to search for his good pleasure, taken counsel with our director and perhaps with two or three other spiritual persons, we must come to a resolution and decision in the name of God. After that we must not call our choice in doubt, but devoutly, peacefully, and firmly keep it and sustain it" ([1616] 1963, 2:95).

Power highlights two points. First, human free will, the capacity for choosing, is used "in the name of God"; and second, we should not question the final choice because "once made, in the name of God, it likewise becomes the will of God through cultivating and supporting it" (1994, 269; the translation is mine). We have a co-creative process with God. Our choice *becomes* God's signified will. God "waits" for our discerned choice.

The above method exemplifies co-creativity when we are specifically searching for the signified will of God. In Book Nine de Sales illustrates the difficulty humanity faces in living between two wills when he describes the image of the child Jesus walking with his mother Mary ([1616] 1963, 2:131–32). Sometimes we are carried by the events that confront us in life (as Jesus in the arms of Mary); at other times we walk on our own, using our own free will in conformity with God's as much as possible (as the child Jesus walked on his own yet held Mary's hand). We live with a free will that allows for choices, but we also do not know the events of God's good pleasure before they happen. As in cases of suffering and death, such results should not be imagined as "desired" by God but understood to be within general providence (Power 1994, 270).

The human-divine process is unique because of free will, a characteristic not shared by the rest of creation. At the same time, the dynamic quality of de Sales' view of the human-divine relationship, rooted in his humanistic understanding of divine love, makes Salesian spirituality more broadly relevant to present-day science-theology discussions. As Power puts it, at the heart of de Sales' practical spirituality "is a dynamic conception, sometimes dialectical, open, flexible, realistic and idealistic, a continuing process, well adapted to the life lived in the bustle of worldly affairs" (1994, 272; the translation is mine). This view of the Christian life allows de Sales' thought to enter contemporary theologies of nature that take chance into account.

Theologies of Chance

Given the reality of chance at work in the everyday events of our world, how can we see God acting? Does chance deny divine providence or the omniscience of God? Where does God fit into the interplay between law and chance? Law, or observed order in the universe, has been credited to

God since biblical times (see Psalm 104). Can chance, an accepted reality, also be credited to God? Bartholomew's answer: "God generates the requisite degree of randomness much as we do, by deterministic means" (1984, 102). Statisticians generate random numbers by determined algorithms; so does God—but better. Just as law and chance are integrally connected in the observed universe, so they are by God in the creative process. Chance fashions flexibility and variety—a diversity rooted in unity (Peacocke 1993, 102–3), as in de Sales' "unidiverse."

Elizabeth Johnson supports a positive interpretation of how Thomas Aquinas would respond to chance (1996, 10–14). Bartholomew quotes Thomas's *Summa Contra Gentiles:* "Now it would be inconsistent with divine providence if all things happened of necessity, as we proved above. Therefore it would also be inconsistent with divine providence if there were no luck or chance in the world" (1984, 124). This is consistent with the selfless and "letting be" characteristics of divine grace. Hence, we should expect not rigid necessity but chance and contingency in our world (Haught 2000, 40). As a Thomist, de Sales would resonate with chance and its place within divine providence. Although Aeschylus' death is a "chance event," it is divine action ([1616] 1963, 1:110). The "various causes" that may effect such an event may never be known by us, yet they are under the direction of God at work in the universe. In other words, it can all be traced back to God, the primary cause, but "ordinarily God's providence does not violate the laws of nature" ([1616] 1963, 1:220). All occurrences, including those described as chance, operate within a framework. Although we can recognize chance for what it is, namely God's action, we are unable to know specifically why and how God does so. "Who can penetrate the meaning, the understanding, and the purpose, of God?" ([1616] 1963, 1:225) Similarly, Denis Edwards asks, "Does not the doctrine of divine transcendence suggest that God might achieve purposes in a way that radically transcends all human notions of achieving purposes?" (1999, 53)

Given the description of how chance and law are a reality intimately linked together, the image of a Designer God with a blueprint no longer suffices. This interplay in evolution replaces the blueprint with a "matrix" exhibiting "God's continuous and immanent action" that works "in, under, and through it" (Russell 1998, 210).[9] Drawing on the famous image conveyed by Albert Einstein, Thomas Tracy has an interesting way of describing how to image God within this evolutionary world: "God does indeed play dice with the universe, but . . . God designs the dice" (1998, 516). God creates it all, including some undetermined events the outcomes of which are determined by chance. Barbour calls this the "Determiner of Indeterminacies" model of the divine within an evolutionary world: "What appears to be chance . . . may be the very point at which God acts" (1998, 432). This model calls upon God's creation to participate and "complete its own creation" (Tracy 1998, 515). Causal laws provide consistency at

the macro level, but God creates boundary conditions of probabilistic laws. The probability factor provides openness, so human freedom is preserved. As did de Sales, Nancey Murphy uses the example of Joseph and his brothers (Genesis 45:5) to illustrate this human-divine process (1997, 354).

A Salesian example of indeterminate occurrences are inspirations, "those interior attractions, motions, acts of self-reproach and remorse, lights and conceptions that God works in us . . . in order to awaken, stimulate, urge, and attract us to holy virtues, heavenly love, and good resolutions" (de Sales [1609] 1966, 109). Cooperation with these inspirations is illustrated by the saint's allegory of apodes—birds that cannot fly without the aid of wind lifting them off the ground. Cooperation with the wind allows the apodes to maintain flight. Providence gives us spiritual attractions with which we must cooperate so as to love God more deeply. As the wind is to the apodes, so God's inspirations are to humanity—a persuasive means ([1616] 1963, 1:124, 134–35) with which we cooperate. Like a composer (Peacocke 1993, 175–77) and a choreographer whose final creation is left to the improvisation of a musician and a dancer, God's inspirations are communicating information (Polkinghorne 1997; Barbour 1998, 435) to which we freely respond. When sending inspirations God does not determine our response, nor can the response to them be predicted. In light of the uncertainty of the outcome of such inspirations (the person's chosen response), they may be considered chance events as defined by Bartholomew (1984, 66).

Human freedom allows us to cooperate with divine providence. Possibilities lie before us, but we also must rely on God's guidance. De Sales advises, "strive quietly on your part to cooperate with its designs. . . . Imitate little children who with one hand hold fast to their father while with the other they gather strawberries or blackberries from the hedges. So too if you gather and handle the goods of this world with one hand, you must always hold fast with the other to your heavenly Father's hand." As sailors rely on the stars for guidance, so too we look to God: "Thus God will work with you, in you, and for you" ([1609] 1966, 152–53). Hence, an open and flexible process of living between the two wills of God is illustrated. Although de Sales speaks of humanity, in light of contemporary views of nature cooperation with the Creator can be extended to all of creation.

The above discussion supports the immanent and transcendent Christian God. Bartholomew believes "God chose to make a world of chance because it would have the properties necessary for producing beings fit for fellowship with him" (1984, 138). Chance expresses God's creative action and at the same time allows for freedom. This suggests panentheism, whereby "God so penetrates the universe that everything is in God" yet "while including the universe, God's being goes beyond it" (O'Collins and Farrugia 2000, 187). Peacocke uses the analogy of Beethoven's Seventh

Symphony to illustrate this concept—it expresses a composer's inner creativity without being identified with him (1986, 96–97). The freedom expressed in the chance events of inspirations implies a level of risk, or a sense of self-limitation (*kenosis*), on God's part. Through the freedom gifted to humanity God enters into a drama of chance within the human-divine love relationship.

Process thought "stresses the priority of becoming over being" (O'Collins and Farrugia 2000, 213). Within process theology, the image of God is the source of both order and novelty; this clearly supports the interplay of law and chance in creation. Possibilities become actualized by means of chance. Likewise, the God of process thought "is present in the interiority of every event as it unfolds, but God never exclusively determines the outcome" (Barbour 2000, 217).[10] God is persuasive rather than coercive. Because freedom and autonomy are allowed in creation, "an extravagant Generosity . . . underlies the whole cosmic process" (Haught 1995, 67). This persuasive God presents a paradigm shift from monarch to lover (Johnson 1996, 17).

In recent theological studies, an illustration of this shift is God the "Mother of the Universe" (McFague 1997, for example). De Sales' own works mirror this shift from coercion to persuasion. In the *Introduction*, God is imaged as divine majesty: "You wish to live a life of devotion, dearest Philothea, because you are a Christian and know that it is a virtue most pleasing to God's Majesty" ([1609] 1966, 39). However, de Sales' later *Treatise* illustrates the image of God as mother. His maternal imagery for God is "rooted in his experience of his own mother. . . . Madame de Sales was only fifteen when Francis was born, and he retained a very affectionate relationship to his mother throughout his life" (Wolski Conn 1997, 7–8). God the Mother, who "loves agapically in giving with no thought of return the sustenance needed for life to continue," differs from a Master Craftsman image because *creatio continua* is implied (McFague 1997, 258 n. 38). As the reality of chance has shown, creation is not a once-for-all event. De Sales' imagery of Christ's maternal breast supports this: "His breasts of sweetness prepared for us that milk which is his movements, his attractions, his inspirations, and the dear delights by which he draws, leads, and nourishes our hearts into eternal life" ([1616] 1963, 2:280). With the human-divine relationship of love placed foremost throughout Salesian spirituality, the maternal image is a perfect embodiment of de Sales' message. The image of the child Jesus walking with Mary illustrates both this maternal constancy and loving guidance.

Although his theology is not a process theology, de Sales' spirituality, focused on the heart-to-heart relationship of God to humanity, clearly involves persuasion. Because love is the means and the goal, "God solicits, exhorts, incites, inspires, assists, and rescues us" to draw us into relationship, to salvation ([1616] 1963, 2:62). De Sales believes salvation is in-

tended for all, and within an evolutionary worldview this *all* includes the entire universe. For this salvation, God "provided and determined . . . all the means needed . . . to attain the end" by supreme providence ([1616] 1963, 1:108). One such persuasive means is chance. Employing a banquet image, de Sales shows how God's desire for a particular end is offered. Hosts do not "open a friend's mouth by main force, cram food down his throat, and make him swallow it"; rather, a guest is offered a feast "by way of invitation, persuasion, and solicitation, not violently and forcibly thrust . . . it is done by way of desire and not of absolute will" ([1616] 1963, 2:62–63). God does not coerce but waits and allows us to follow our own path. In this sense, risk and *kenosis* are evident: "God's love, intermingled with his creature's free will, amounted to a divine risk: the possibility of sin" (Fiorelli 1989, 95). Where freedom is operative, chance is found.

Conclusion

Francis de Sales' spirituality of the heart provides several relevant insights into the theological implications of chance. Although he espoused an independence method of relating science and religion, his thought can be applied to current attempts for constructive interaction between the two fields. A Christian humanist, he recognized the love of God as paramount to a human-divine relationship. With the capacity of love fused to human freedom and reason, a real ability to cooperate with God in creative processes is possible.

Although divine providence—God's plan of love—comprises chance events, the divine inspirations sent to human beings reflect an indeterminism: the inability to predict the persons' free response to them. The criteria described in our discussion of chance therefore are met, and de Sales' understanding of the interaction of the human with the divine demonstrates how human freedom opens the door for indeterminism, and co-creation, in the universe. God's love for creation is the impetus for the chance events that emerge between divine providence and human freedom.

Within current discussions about science and religion, de Sales might recommend to us that this interrelatedness described in the human-divine relationship may be a standard by which we see God's relation to all of creation. Humanity's co-creative participation and God's subtle persuasiveness, as expressed in the saint's works, are reflective of the reality of chance in the "unidiverse." Our view of divine action in a world of chance is enhanced by Salesian spirituality. Likewise, contemporary theologies of chance provide a framework for a fresh understanding of his teachings.

NOTES

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1. Although Salesian spirituality is considered to be "the co-creation of both de Sales and his friend Jeanne de Chantal" (Wright 1996, 158; Wright and Power 1988, 11–13), for the purposes of this article I use the term Salesian spirituality to refer strictly to that of Francis de Sales.
2. Natural theology is defined as "arguments for the existence of God based on human reason and observation, including arguments starting from evidence of design in nature or in the processes of nature" (Barbour 1997, 358).
3. In contrast to natural theology that begins with science, a theology of nature has its starting point in a religious tradition whose beliefs need reformulation in light of science.
4. Although this view agreed with what later became known as Molinism, a teaching on the autonomy of the human power of moral self-determination to good or evil (Levi 1994, 793), William Marceau strongly notes that the saint was not a Molinist but only agreed with Molinism on the point of predestination. De Sales was "on the whole a Thomist" and "theocentric, yet, wishing to procure the glory of God through man's perfection, he habitually spoke the language of an anthropocentrist" (Marceau 1989, 30).
5. Expected to die of a serious illness while studying law in Padua, Francis responded: "I entrust my soul to God. As for my body, when I am dead, I ask you to entrust it to the medical students so that having not served the world during my life, it can be used for something after my death" (Ravier 1994, 298, quoting Charles-August de Sales; the translation is mine).
6. The *Académie florimontane* was a society of scholars and literary men who shared expertise on theology, politics, philosophy, rhetoric, cosmography, geometry, arithmetic, languages, the art of navigation, and music theory (Ravier 1988, 156–57).
7. In 1617, without the approbation of de Sales or that of his Superior General, Baranzano published *Uranoscopia seu de coelo*, in which he taught the Copernican theory and some ideas of Galileo. When the Barnabite was called back to Milan, de Sales intervened on Baranzano's behalf. After returning to Annecy, Baranzano wrote an opusculum in which he implicitly separated the realms of science and faith. The support of this autonomy of science by de Sales is evidenced in his written approval of Baranzano's later work, *Novae opinions physicae* (*New Opinion in Physics*) (1618). Pocetto (2001) discusses these events in detail.
8. Certainly, de Sales would engage in conversation between faith and reason (religion and science). However, within a contemporary typology, de Sales' "autonomy" could be classified as the independence model (Barbour 1997, 84–89) or as the contrast method of relating religion and science (Haught 1995, 12–17).
9. Russell encapsulates the position given in Peacocke's 1979 Bampton Lectures.
10. Barbour's discussion of the salient points of process theology is based on Cobb and Griffin 1976.

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