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Providentia Dei: A Comparative Study of the Concept of Providentia in the Old and New Testaments

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Abstract:

The concept of Providentia Dei, or divine providence, is a central doctrine in Christian theology, affirming God's active involvement in the care, organization, and guidance of creation and human history. This study aims to comparatively examine the concept of Providentia Dei in the Old and New Testaments to explore the theological continuity and transformation that occur in the biblical narrative. Using a qualitative approach through literature study and historical-literary hermeneutic analysis, this study analyzes primary biblical texts and critical dialogues with classical and contemporary theological thought. The results of the study indicate that in the Old Testament, Providentia Dei is primarily expressed within a cosmological-historical and covenantal framework, with an emphasis on God's care for Israel as a covenant people in collective history. Meanwhile, the New Testament presents a radical reorientation that is Christocentric, personal, and eschatological, in which divine providence culminates in the incarnation, cross, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. This study asserts that this shift is not a discontinuity, but rather a theological transformation that culminates in the fulfillment of the redemptive narrative. Christ serves as the hermeneutical axis that unites the understanding of

Providentia Dei in both canons. Furthermore, this study demonstrates the relevance of the doctrine of Providentia Dei to the contemporary context, particularly in addressing the problem of evil, the relationship between God's sovereignty and human freedom, the ecological crisis, and the demands of social justice. Thus, Providentia Dei is understood not merely as an abstract doctrinal concept, but as a relational, participatory, and transformative foundation of faith for the lives of Christians today.

Keywords: Biblical hermeneutics; Christocentric; Divine providence; New Testament; Old Testament; Providentia Dei.

INTRODUCTION

The concept of Providentia Dei, or divine providence, is a fundamental doctrine in the Christian theological tradition, playing a crucial role in shaping believers' perspectives on the relationship between God and His creation. In the classical understanding, God is not only seen as the Creator who initiated everything, but also as the One who actively maintains, regulates, and guides the course of human history toward a grand plan of redemption (Bavinck, 2004). This understanding carries profound implications that no event in human life is free from His knowledge and sovereignty, while simultaneously strengthening the faith of the congregation amidst the uncertainties of the times. Since the Old Testament, the concept of Providentia Dei has been firmly embedded in historical narratives that emphasize God's concrete presence in the events of the lives of the people of Israel. The story of Israel's deliverance from Egypt (Exodus 14), their provision in the wilderness (Deuteronomy 8:3–4), and the life of Joseph, who revealed the plan of redemption through unexpected means (Genesis 50:20), all reflect divine providence as a sovereign act that governs the collective history of His chosen people. Within this framework, divine providence has a communal dimension that emphasizes the formation of the people's identity as a holy nation, called to be a blessing to other nations.

On the other hand, the New Testament presents an understanding of Providentia Dei with an increasingly Christocentric emphasis. Through the work of Jesus Christ, the incarnation, crucifixion, death, and resurrection, divine providence reaches its climax (Eph. 1:9–10). The emphasis in the New Testament shifts from a nationalistic framework to the universality of salvation, where Christ's work restores God's relationship with all humanity, even creation as a whole (Rom. 8:19–22). The presence of the Holy Spirit as the Helper (John 14:26) becomes a form of ongoing providence in the life of the church and every individual believer (Acts 2:1–4). The personal and eschatological nuances further emphasize that Providentia Dei does not stop at material care, but embraces the hope of a perfect renewal of creation.

This difference in emphasis between the Old and New Testaments raises the urgent need for a thorough examination of how the continuity and discontinuity of the concept of divine providence develop in the Bible. In reality, studies that systematically compare the two canons are still limited and often fall into partial readings (Rey, 2018). Most research focuses solely on one of the testaments without bridging the dialectical relationship between them. Yet, without a proper comparative approach, believers risk a fragmented

understanding of this doctrine, thus losing the integrity of the redemptive narrative that is the central thread of Christian theology. Beyond the challenge of fragmentation, hermeneutical issues cannot be ignored. The redemptive-historical approach, which views the Bible as a single, progressive and unified redemptive narrative, is rarely consistently applied in the study of Providentia Dei (Stevanus & Yunianto, 2020). The absence of this approach has the potential to create a dichotomy between the rigid and fearful God of the Old Testament and the loving and merciful God of the New Testament, even though both speak of the same God, only with a growing emphasis on revelation.

On the other hand, contemporary realities increasingly demand that the church reinterpret the doctrine of Providentia Dei to remain relevant. The problem of evil (theodicy) is both a classic and contemporary challenge: how can an all-good and all-powerful God allow suffering to occur? Beek points out that believers often experience a crisis of faith when they cannot find a satisfactory rational and pastoral answer (Eerdmans, 2014). The discourse of determinism and free will also adds to the complexity: does divine providence negate human responsibility or actually affirm it? (Purwonugroho, 2024). The aspect of ecological relevance also requires serious attention. Research by Reba et al. highlights that divine providence encompasses not only human care but also the entire creation (Reba et al., 2022). However, people's understanding is often trapped in practical reductionism: God is understood only as a provider of sustenance and health, while human responsibility to protect the environment is often neglected. Yet, the global climate crisis requires a renewed ethical framework that bridges faith and concrete action.

The increasingly real threat of ecological crises, from global warming to the loss of biodiversity, demands not only technocratic solutions but also a profound reflection on the values underlying how humans interact with nature. In this pressing situation, religious discourse, with its power to shape ethics and worldviews, is increasingly recognized as a vital source of inspiration. This is where ecotheology emerges, not merely as an academic subdiscipline, but as a movement of thought that seeks to address the anxieties of the times by harmonizing spirituality and ecology. As Pihkala (Pihkala, 2013), argues, this field is essentially a systematic effort to formulate a relevant theological response to the environmental crisis, an effort that is increasingly relevant amidst the impasse of solely anthropocentric approaches.

Internal dynamics within religious traditions themselves have fueled the emergence of ecotheology, primarily as a form of correction to narratives that have long been considered to contribute to environmental degradation. Sharp criticism is often leveled at the Christian tradition, which is accused of promoting a view that places humans at the center of the universe. However, what is noteworthy is the progressive response from within, manifested in part by rediscovering the roots of ecological thought that has existed since the early twentieth century (Pihkala, 2016). This corrective spirit then found momentum in recent developments, as reflected in the encyclical Laudato si', which vehemently calls for ecological conversion and reconciliation with creation (Roccia, 2024). More than mere doctrine, this development represents a paradigm shift toward a "green theology" that prioritizes a spirituality that celebrates and restores the relationship with the Earth. What makes ecotheology so rich and applicable is its contextual and adaptive nature. It is not confined to sacred texts but lives and breathes through community practices at the grassroots level. In Indonesia, for example, the commitment to preserving

the springs in Batu stems not from government policy alone, but from deeply rooted religious beliefs and local wisdom (Maksum et al., 2023). Similarly, the eco-Islamic movement seeks to instill environmental ethics through education, reframing the human-nature relationship within a holistic, theocentric framework (Haneef et al., 2015). Even the syncretism occurring in Northeast India, where Christianity engages with Naga animism, has given rise to an inclusive cosmology rich in conservation values (Putatunda et al., 2024). Ultimately, through this fluid dialogue between faith, science, and local wisdom, ecotheology offers a hopeful solution—a religious narrative that restores, rather than exploits, the earth we share.

The issue of social justice increasingly challenges how this doctrine is lived out. God's provision and protection should not be interpreted passively, fostering a fatalistic attitude. Instead, awareness of Providentia Dei should be a driving force for fighting for justice, empowering the oppressed, and upholding social solidarity amidst inequality (Purwonugroho, 2024). This demonstrates that the relevance of Providentia Dei demands both a spiritual and practical dimension. In this context, this research addresses the urgent need for holistic and contextual research.

This study will systematically describe the concept of Providentia Dei in the Old Testament so that the foundation of the historical narrative and its meaning can be clearly mapped. Next, this study will analyze the concept of Providentia Dei in the New Testament based on the gospel narrative and the teachings of Jesus Christ, which emphasize the Christocentric and eschatological dimensions. The next step is to critically compare the two understandings to find the continuity of the redemption narrative as well as the differences in theological emphases that are the richness of the Christian faith. This approach is expected to be able to bridge the often separate readings, thus showing how the Old Testament and the New Testament explain and complement each other in order to understand God's providence as a whole. This study will formulate theological implications of the study results for the development of contemporary theology. In an increasingly complex context, Christians need a deep and applicable understanding of how God's role works amidst modern challenges such as the problem of evil, free will, the ecological crisis, and social injustice. Thus, Providentia Dei is not only an abstract doctrinal concept, but also a foundation of faith that is grounded and transformative for the lives of the people.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Research on providentia Dei as a theological doctrine that discusses divine providence in the Christian tradition has been conducted using various approaches, both biblical, systematic, and historical. However, studies that specifically compare the concept of providence in the Old and New Testaments are still relatively rare. Therefore, this review of previous research aims to determine the relevance and scope of contribution of the proposed research. First, the study by Halawa and Zega (2025) entitled "Analysis of the Church in the Old Testament and the Church in the New Testament: An Ecclesiological Study" in the Magistra Journal, examines the continuity of the concept of the community of God's people in two parts of Scripture. Although not explicitly addressing the concept of providence, their analysis shows how God's care for His people continues from the Old Testament to the New Testament, thus providing a conceptual foundation parallel to the doctrine of divine providence (Halawa & Zega, 2025).

Furthermore, Wijaya's (2015) thesis entitled "Missiology Based on the Old and New Testaments" makes an important contribution in understanding how God's mission (missio Dei) is a manifestation of active and progressive providence. In this thesis, God's providence is not only described as care, but also as a missionary movement that integrates people from the Old Testament to the New Testament (Wijaya, 2015). Manullang (2021) in his article entitled "Parables in the Teachings of Jesus: A Hermeneutical Study in the New Testament" explains how parable narratives reflect God's involvement in shaping and nurturing the faith of His people. This hermeneutical study provides a perspective on God's providence in the context of Jesus' teachings, which are the main representation of providence Dei in the New Testament (Manullang, 2021). In a broader article, Mau (2020) conducted a "Survey Study of the Old and New Testaments of the Bible as the Basis for Teaching the Christian Faith." This study reflects the narrative continuity between the Old Testament and the New Testament in building a theological structure that implies the existence of divine providence in the entire biblical story (Mau, 2020).

Sanjaya (2022), in his article on the hermeneutics of the Second Vatican Council, particularly through the document Dei Verbum, outlines principles of biblical interpretation relevant to understanding the relationship between the Old Testament and the New Testament. Although starting from a Catholic context, this study is relevant to strengthening the historical-literary method used in this research (Sanjaya, 2022). Another significant source comes from the Reformed Theology website (2025), which presents a systematic study of biblical theology and the relationship between the Old Testament and the New Testament through the lens of Reformed theology. Thoughts such as those put forward by Ridderbos, Clowney, and Goldsworthy provide an understanding that the biblical narrative is a providential unity centered on the work of Christ (Reformed, 2025). Finally, the article by Siby, Suseno, and Hadi (2022) on "A Biblical Study of Genesis 12:1–3 as a Foundation for Evangelism in a Pluralistic Society" emphasizes the election of Abraham as the beginning of the history of universal divine providence. An analysis of this passage shows how providence begins in the Old Testament and is fulfilled in New Testament evangelism (Siby et al., 2022).

Based on a review of various previous studies, it can be concluded that the discourse on providentia Dei has been an important topic in the Christian theological tradition, whether through biblical, systematic, or historical approaches. However, most of these studies still focus on a single portion of Scripture, either the Old or New Testament, without developing a direct comparative study of the concept of divine providence between the two. On the other hand, several indirectly related studies have made important contributions to the formation of relevant theological, methodological, and narrative foundations. However, there has been no research that explicitly and systematically compares the dimensions of creatio continua, conservatio, and gubernatio in the context of the Old and New Testaments. Thus, there is a significant scientific gap in this area of research. Therefore, the study entitled "Providentia Dei: A Comparative Study of the Concept of Providentia in the Old and New Testaments" is very strategic and worthy of development. Not only will this research broaden the understanding of divine attributes in the two ages of revelation, but it will also enrich the academic treasury in the study of religions through an integrated historical-literary and narrative hermeneutic approach. This position provides strong justification for the urgency and relevance of research in today's academic and theological context.

METHOD

This research uses a qualitative approach with a library research method, as stated by Sugiyono that qualitative research focuses on in-depth interpretation of non-empirical data in the form of written texts and documents (Sugiyono, 2013). This approach was chosen because the main orientation of the research is not directed at collecting field data, but rather on conceptual and interpretative analysis of relevant written sources. In this context, the research focuses on the study of biblical texts, both the Old and New Testaments, which contain the concept of providentia Dei explicitly or implicitly. In addition to the Bible as the primary source, this research is supported by various secondary theological literature, including works of biblical interpretation, systematic theology books, academic journal articles, and writings by classical and contemporary theologians discussing the theme of divine providence. The library research method allows researchers to trace the historical development of the doctrine of providentia Dei in the tradition of church interpretation, while also examining how the concept is understood in various theological contexts, both in Judaism in the Old Testament era and Christianity in the New Testament era. Through this approach, an in-depth analysis of the text is carried out, including a linguistic study of key terms in Hebrew and Greek in order to capture the contextual nuances of meaning.

The type of data used is qualitative in the form of narrative and descriptive texts relevant to the study of the doctrine of providentia Dei. Primary data was obtained from various versions of the Bible translation, such as the New Translation of the Bible and the Revised Standard Version. In addition, the works of great theologians such as Augustine (The City of God) (Augustine, 1998), Thomas Aquinas (Summa Theologiae) (64–68), John Calvin (Institutes of the Christian Religion) (Calvin, 1960), and Karl Barth (Church Dogmatics) (Barth, 1936) were used to trace the conceptual dynamics of this doctrine in the history of theology. Data collection techniques were carried out through critical reading, systematic recording, and grouping data into main themes. The collected data were then analyzed using content analysis and comparative analysis, with a hermeneutic approach as an interpretive framework. This analysis aims to identify continuities and differences in the understanding of providentia Dei between the Old and New Testaments, as well as formulate their relevance for reflection on contemporary Christian theology.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

An Intertextual Study of Providential Reorientation from Cosmos to Christ

This comparative-critical study reveals a substantive paradigmatic shift in the construction of the doctrine of providence between the Old and New Testament canons. In the Old Testament, the understanding of divine providence is often represented through the narrative of Israel's history, wisdom in everyday life, and prophetic admonitions that emphasize God's sovereignty working in and through, and sometimes even against, human freedom and failure (Fretheim, 2010; Goldingay, 2009). This finding not only highlights an aspect that has received little attention in the study of biblical theology but also opens up a new hermeneutical space for understanding the dynamics of progressive revelation, where divine meaning is not static but is dynamically revealed within the flow of the biblical narrative (Caird, 1980). Interestingly, this conceptual transformation is not simply a linear evolution, but rather represents a constantly moving divine-human dialectic within the framework of salvation, a dynamic interaction between divine

sovereignty and human agency that theologians such as Karl Barth steadfastly defended in Church Dogmatics III/3.(Vanhoozer, 2005)

As Wright (2015) observes, the incarnation of Christ serves as a "hermeneutical pivot" that recalibrates the entire biblical narrative, including the understanding of providence. The events of Christ, particularly the cross and resurrection, no longer position providence merely as an external intervention, but as God's participation in the suffering and reality of the world in order to save it (N. T. Wright, 2015). Thus, this doctrine undergoes a recentralization from a concept of general providence to a Christ-centered and redemptive providence (N. T. Wright, 2016). This analysis confirms that the New Testament undertakes a radical reorientation by centering providence on the person and work of Christ. However, what is worth emphasizing is how this reorientation does not invalidate the Old Testament narrative, but rather gives it a paradoxical fulfillment (Gavrilyuk, 2004). As argued, in the incarnation, God not only reveals himself but also "restores a way of reading history" that has been distorted by sin. Thus, Christological providence becomes a hermeneutical key to understanding both continuity and discontinuity in biblical narrative (Fretheim, 2010).

The reading of the Old Testament in this study shows that the concept of divine providence (providentia Dei) is far more complex than simply depicting God's control over the world. God's providence operates in three interrelated domains: cosmological, historical, and covenantal. At the cosmological level, texts such as Psalm 104 and Job 38–41 present God as the Sustainer of all creation, concerned with the order of the cosmos as well as the survival of living beings. However, the Old Testament narrative places greater emphasis on the historical-covenantal dimension, where God's providence manifests itself through His choice and inclusion of Israel as the covenant people. This dimension is interpreted comprehensively (Goldingay, 2003; C. J. H. Wright, 2006), viewing the entire Old Testament narrative as a "gospel for Israel," that is, the news of God's faithfulness at work in concrete history. This study also finds that the concept of providence in the Old Testament is never free from internal tensions. God is portrayed as the absolute and unchallenged ruler of history (Isaiah 40:22–24), yet at the same time the Bible also allows for human freedom and responsibility. The narrative of God "repenting" (Genesis 6:6; 1 Samuel 15:11) serves as a crucial example of how God's relationship with creation is dynamically portrayed. This tension is an expression of the creative dialectic between God's transcendence and immanence in ancient Israelite theology (Levenson, 2016). This perspective is reinforced by Terence E. Fretheim, who emphasizes that the anthropomorphic language of God's repentance reveals the relational and responsive character of divine action (Fretheim, 1984).

Providence in the Old Testament often functions as a form of communal theodicy that interprets suffering through the framework of the covenant. However, the Israelite wisdom tradition, particularly in the books of Job and Ecclesiastes, challenges this overly simplistic explanation of theodicy. Walter Brueggemann understands this dynamic as a tension between Israel's "testimony" and "denial" regarding God's justice. Similarly, James L. Crenshaw shows how wisdom literature consciously deconstructs traditional responses to human suffering. Thus, the Old Testament itself contains an internal critique of the deterministic and mechanistic model of divine providence, while simultaneously demonstrating the depth of its theological reflection (Brueggemann, 1997; Crenshaw, 2010). The New Testament presents a radical transformation in the understanding of providence.

Through the incarnation, God's providence is no longer understood merely as an abstract principle but as a personal reality that culminates in the events of the cross and resurrection. Hans Urs von Balthasar asserts that the cross is a paradoxical form of providence, in which God's plan is fulfilled precisely through human rejection. Balthasar added that the glory of God is most fully expressed precisely in the humiliation of the cross, so that divine providence finds its peak expression in the paradox of suffering (Balthasar, 2018).

Analysis of New Testament texts reveals three major shifts. First, providence becomes personalized. In John's Gospel, God's providence manifests itself in the relationship of mutual abiding (menō) between God, Christ, and believers (John 15:1–11). Craig R. Koester interprets this concept as an intimate and existential form of providence, while Raymond E. Brown asserts that the metaphor of the vine and the branches illustrates the relational core of divine providence (Brown, 1966; Koester, 2008). Second, providence becomes universalized. Through Pentecost, the Holy Spirit becomes the agent of God's providence that transcends ethnic and religious boundaries (Acts 2:5–11). James D. G. Dunn traces this dynamic as the beginning of the church's universal mission, which N. T. Wright later affirms as the fulfillment of God's promise to the nations. Allan R. Bevere even sees Pentecost as a reversal of the events of Babel, where the divisions of humanity begin to be healed under the providential work of God (Bevere, 2019; Dunn, 2009; N. T. Wright, 2011). Third, providence has an eschatological orientation. Jürgen Moltmann (2016) understands divine providence as a force that directs all creation toward eschatological fulfillment, where God "becomes all in all" (1 Corinthians 15:28). Christ's resurrection is understood as a prolepsis of the final restoration (Moltmann, 2016; Thiselton, 2000; N. T. Wright, 2003).

In the contemporary context, the doctrine of providence demands critical reconstruction. The classical model formulated by Augustine and systematized by Thomas Aquinas is often understood in a static and deterministic manner. However, dialogue with modern science and reflection on human freedom demand a more relational paradigm. Augustine's thinking on grace and free will, as well as Aquinas's framework of causality, open up space for an understanding of providence that does not negate natural contingency. Central to this reconfiguration lies Christology and pneumatology. Through the concept of kenosis in Sergei Bulgakov's thought and its development by Slesinski and Gavrilyuk, divine providence is understood as God's willing involvement in self-limitation for the sake of creation's freedom. The pneumatological dimension is enriched by Pentecostal theology, which views the work of the Holy Spirit as the real participation of the people in divine providence. This synergistic framework finds practical expression in the thought of John Wesley, who interpreted providence as part of an economy of grace that invites a free human response. Echoes of this thought are emphasized by Thomas Jay Oord with the concept of non-coercive providence, and by Miroslav Volf who interprets God's sovereignty as liberating sovereignty (Volf, 2011). Thus, this study asserts that providentia Dei reaches its peak not in deterministic control, but in a loving relationship that invites participation. God's sovereignty and human freedom are not mutually exclusive poles, but find harmony in the dynamic of love pioneered by Christ and enlivened by the Holy Spirit.

The Dynamics of Continuity and Transformation in the Narrative of Divine Providence Salvation

This study aims to present a new reading of the theological development of the concept of providence, by emphasizing that although the Old and New Testaments depart from the same recognition of God's sovereignty over history and the cosmos, the form of its actualization has undergone a fundamental change. This shift is not cosmetic, but structural: from a predominantly collective, legalistic, and national framework to a more personal, Christocentric, and eschatologically oriented paradigm. In contrast to classical comparative approaches that often treat the two biblical corpuses statically and parallelly, this study emphasizes the internal dynamics and theological tensions that accompany the evolution of the understanding of providence. The analysis shows that the New Testament does not simply continue the theological legacy of the Old Testament, but rather undertakes a radical reinterpretation of it, with the event of Christ as the central hermeneutical axis. As Elliott emphasizes, the human experience of providence undergoes a profound shift: from being primarily understood in communal-historical categories to a personal and existential experience. Thus, providence is no longer read merely as a pattern of divine intervention in the history of a nation, but as a relational reality experienced in the individual life of the believer.

In the context of the Old Testament, God's providence is primarily expressed in the collective realm, namely through God's care, discipline, and judgment of Israel as a covenant community. God's relationship with his people is framed by the covenant made with Abraham and renewed through Moses, which serves as a legal-theological structure for understanding blessings and curses. Prosperity, political security, and the continuation of the lineage are seen as signs of divine blessing, while military defeat, disaster, and exile are interpreted as consequences of collective unfaithfulness. The book of Deuteronomy, particularly chapter 28, explicitly formulates this logic, and Miller's commentary asserts that this pattern serves as the primary lens for reading Israel's history from the Exodus to the Exile. Similarly, Brueggemann demonstrates that Old Testament theology is deeply tied to the historical drama of the covenant community, particularly in its relationship to the institutions of kingship and land. Its focus is on the magnalia Dei, the great acts of God that shaped Israel's national and religious identity. This perspective is also emphasized by C. J. H. Wright, who places providence within the ethical framework of God's mission within the concrete history of a nation. Thus, in the Old Testament, the experience of divine providence is almost always corporate and tied to the historical destiny of the community (N. T. Wright, 2003).

A sharp paradigm shift occurs in the New Testament, when the center of gravity of providence shifts from the nation and the law to the person and work of Jesus Christ. The events of the crucifixion and resurrection, which at first glance appear to be the complete failure of the Old Testament messianic hopes, are interpreted as the culmination of the divine plan. Peter's statement in Acts 2:23 explicitly reveals this dialectic: human evil actions are not beyond God's control, but are mysteriously integrated into His saving purpose. This theme becomes central to reflections on the theology of redemption, as explored by Hengel and other New Testament interpreters. N. T. Wright interprets this shift as a radical redefinition of who the people of God are. The people's identity is no longer determined by ethnicity or adherence to the law, but by a relationship of faith with the crucified and risen Christ. The Christological consequences of this redefinition, as Bauckham emphasizes, fundamentally change the way providence is experienced: no longer as political success or national triumph, but as

reconciliation with God and the formation of a new, transnational community, the church (N. T. Wright, 1992).

A direct implication of this transformation is the personalization of the experience of providence. In Paul's letters, confidence in God's providence is articulated not in terms of external success, but rather in the concrete experiences of individuals, including suffering, limitations, and the uncertainties of life. Romans 8:28 is a key text representing this new paradigm, where everything is understood as God's workspace for spiritual good, not merely worldly well-being. As Fee and Bockmuehl note in their study of Philippians, Paul's suffering becomes the primary context for profound reflection on God's faithfulness. This existential dimension is inseparable from a strong eschatological orientation. Providence in the New Testament not only directs the believer's life in the present but also draws all of reality toward the ultimate fulfillment of God's plan. Ephesians 1:9–10 affirms this cosmic vision, in which all things, both in heaven and on earth, are united in Christ. This eschatological vision, as developed by Moltmann and Middleton, shifts the focus from temporal success to the hope of the total restoration of creation.

At a more fundamental level, the continuity between the Old and New Testaments rests on the recognition of the same God as the active Ruler of history. From the creation account to the apocalyptic vision of Revelation, the Bible consistently portrays God as the One who sustains, directs, and judges creation. However, as John Walton points out, the creation narrative itself is best understood not as a material account but as the functional ordering of the cosmos under divine sovereignty. In this light, providence is not merely an occasional intervention but God's modus operandi for maintaining the order and purpose of creation. The New Testament then reconfigures the relational foundations of this providence. While in the Old Testament the relationship was primarily framed by law and collective obedience, in the New Testament its foundation is grace revealed in Christ. The covenant relationship transitions from a formal-legal pattern to a universal, personal relationship. Jesus is understood as the true Israel who bears the curse of the covenant for humanity, and at the same time as the Mediator of the New Covenant who directs God's providence toward a global redemptive mission.

Providence in the light of Christ no longer operates within a simple retributive framework, but rather within a pedagogical and formative framework. God works in all things, including suffering, to shape His people into becoming more like Christ. This orientation affirms that the ultimate goal of providence is not political stability or material success, but rather personal transformation and the hope of cosmic restoration. The development of the concept of providence from the Old Testament to the New Testament demonstrates a transformed continuity. God's sovereignty remains the shared foundation, but the way that sovereignty is experienced and interpreted changes radically through the event of Christ. From the history of a people to personal experience, from law to grace, and from the present to eschatological fulfillment, providence becomes a living, relational reality oriented toward the total restoration of creation.

Reconfiguring Providence Toward a Relevant Understanding of Divine Providence Today

This review highlights a fundamental shift in how the doctrine of divine providence has been understood and formulated throughout the history of Christian thought. In its classical formulation, particularly as developed by Thomas Aquinas in the Summa Theologica, providence is understood as an integral part of God's eternal plan (providentia aeterna), a

metaphysical order that perfectly directs all creation toward its ultimate end without precluding the freedom of human will. This understanding is deeply rooted in the Western theistic tradition, particularly in Augustine's monumental work The City of God, which interprets human history, despite its conflict and evil, as a field of divine providence moving toward its transcendent fulfillment. Aquinas then systematized this view metaphysically by explaining how the unchanging God works through natural law and human rationality to direct all things toward their respective telos. Within this framework, providence serves as a guarantee of cosmic order, allowing suffering and evil to be understood as part of a broader harmony. This belief provides theological stability by affirming that the world is under the control of an all-good and all-knowing God.

However, these metaphysical foundations began to come under serious pressure with the development of modern existential experience and intellectual reflection, particularly since the 20th century. Philosophical critiques of classical theism, such as those put forward by David Hume in his Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion, sharply questioned the coherence of the idea of a good divine plan in the reality of a world filled with random and disproportionate suffering. In the scientific realm, the development of Newtonian mechanistic views to chaos theory introduced naturalistic explanations for the order and disorder of nature, implicitly narrowing the scope for direct divine intervention. At the same time, sociological and historical studies—for example, Max Weber's analysis of the Protestant ethic—demonstrated that the doctrine of providence functioned not only as a metaphysical concept but also had a concrete impact on shaping social and economic ethos. These findings revealed that providence had undergone a shift in meaning, from a universal metaphysical principle to a socio-historical force with various interpretations. Consequently, theology could no longer treat this doctrine as a taken-for-granted assumption but must engage it in critical dialogue with the complexities of contemporary reality.

In response to these pressures, the focus of understanding providence has undergone a significant transformation. While previously this doctrine primarily served as a theoretical answer to the question "why certain events occur," in contemporary theology, providence is more often understood as a pastoral and ethical framework. In post-traumatic contexts—especially after tragedies such as the Holocaust—many theologians reject the idea that suffering is part of God's hidden plan, as this view is considered morally problematic. Instead, providence is interpreted as God's presence accompanying human suffering (compassio Dei). Dorothy Soelle, for example, rejects theologies that justify suffering and emphasizes divine solidarity with those who suffer. Similarly, in the ethical realm, providence is realized as a call for humans to actively participate as "co-workers with God" in the struggle for justice and overcoming structures of oppression. This perspective is central to Gustavo Gutiérrez's liberation theology, which understands God's saving work as a historical process involving human participation in social liberation.

In the context of religious pluralism, exclusive claims about God's plan of salvation are also increasingly being questioned. Theologians such as John Hick propose a more inclusive model of providence, recognizing that divine action is not limited to any one religious tradition. Through his pluralistic approach, providence is reconfigured as a divine activity that transcends conventional boundaries, thus enabling a more equitable interreligious dialogue. Thus, the doctrine of providence undergoes a fundamental shift: from a metaphysical concept of detailed divine control to a participatory understanding of human involvement in God's work of salvation in a fragile world. Historically, the development of the doctrine of

providence has not been linear, but has proceeded through a series of corrections and reinterpretations. Its early roots in Christian thought were influenced by Greco-Roman philosophy, particularly Stoicism, which emphasized the rational order of the cosmos. Over time, the medieval codification and affirmation of this doctrine in Reformed theology inadvertently established a rigid and monolithic model of providence—a "blueprint" for divine control that has proven existentially fragile in the modern era. In contrast to Western developments, the Byzantine tradition emphasized the synergy between divine and human will, an approach that offered an alternative to theological determinism. This hardening of the Western model sparked intense philosophical debates about the relationship between God's action and human freedom.

In contemporary discourse, this debate manifests itself in the trilemma between theological determinism, Molinism, and open theism. These three represent different responses to the problem of divine freedom and knowledge. Determinism and Molinism often struggle to coherently integrate with the doctrine of God's timelessness. Open theism, on the other hand, emphasizes divine temporality and relationality, interpreting providence as a dynamic process open to human response. This approach emerged as an attempt to address the failure of classical models to explain authentic human agency and the reality of suffering, which cannot be reduced to closed metaphysical schemes. At the same time, the deconstruction of Western philosophy—pioneered by Jacques Derrida—made a significant contribution to the critique of traditional metaphysical foundations. By dismantling binary oppositions and rejecting claims of final meaning, deconstruction introduced an understanding of reality as a network of meanings that are always deferred (différance). The development of deconstruction from a critical to an affirmative phase opens up a new ethical space, marked by an unending responsibility towards the Other and an unfulfilled hope for justice. In this context, deconstruction not only shakes up classical metaphysics, but also provides a relevant ethical-political framework for a plural and post-truth world.

The implications of deconstruction extend across disciplines, from the social sciences to architecture, and encourage a paradigm shift from essentialism to contingency. In post-deconstructive ontology, identity and meaning are no longer understood as fixed entities, but as constantly evolving relational constructs. The absence of absolute foundations actually gives rise to greater ethical responsibility, as humans can no longer hide behind claims of universal truth. The most significant pressure on the doctrine of providence continues to come from the problem of evil. The Western Christian tradition tends to respond through theodicy, a rational defense of God's justice and omnipotence. However, this approach often gives the impression that suffering is justified by an inscrutable divine will. In contrast, the Eastern Orthodox tradition offers a therapeutic and participatory orientation, understanding providence as God's work in suffering, not its cause. This model shifts the focus from the question of "why" to "how" God accompanies and calls humans to participate in redemption.

In contemporary developments, theodicy has shifted from a speculative project to a practice of existential accompaniment. Rather than justifying suffering, theology increasingly emphasizes solidarity, dialogue, and empathetic presence. A pathocentric paradigm focused on the experience of the suffering subject becomes the meeting point between theological reflection and clinical practice. This approach emphasizes that the response to suffering lies not in theoretical explanations, but in concrete and relational engagement. Ultimately, the

doctrine of providence can no longer be confined to the framework of systematic theology alone. Its interaction with science, culture, and the global context demonstrates that providence is a flexible and continually reshaped discourse. In a secular and trauma-ridden world, providence is interpreted not as an explanation for tragedy, but as a hope for divine presence that works through human solidarity and the practice of justice. Thus, reconstructed providence does not offer easy answers, but rather presents a commitment of faith to walk alongside those who suffer, while remaining open to the possibility of future healing and meaning.

CONCLUSION

This comparative-critical study demonstrates a significant paradigm shift in the understanding of the doctrine of providentia Dei, from a cosmological-historical framework in the Old Testament to a Christocentric formulation in the New Testament. The main contribution of this study does not stop at mapping doctrinal developments, but lies in the affirmation that Christology functions as a hermeneutical axis that restructures the entire biblical narrative. Within this framework, divine providence is understood not as a static concept, but as a dynamic reality that shifts from a general, collectively oriented principle to a personal relationship centered on the person and work of Christ. This reorientation also paves the way for a new understanding of the relationship between God's sovereignty and human freedom, which is no longer placed in a binary opposition, but within a synergistic-relational framework that emphasizes human participation without negating divine sovereignty. Academically, this study makes three important contributions. First, it offers a hermeneutical framework that views the relationship between the Old and New Testaments as a continuity of fulfillment, not a discontinuity, with the cross as its logical center. Second, through a dialogue between classical theological tradition and contemporary philosophical thought, this study formulates a coherent approach to the classic question of determinism and freedom. Third, Christological transformation is positioned as an interpretive key that unlocks the personal, universal, and eschatological dimensions of the doctrine of providence, while affirming God's involvement in the world's suffering. Thus, the future of the doctrine of providence lies not in affirming a rigid model of divine control, but in understanding it as a participatory narrative that finds its most authentic expression in the paradox of the cross: God's providence that does not eliminate suffering, but is present and at work in it.

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