

# DIVINE PROVIDENCE

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*(Divine Providence by Pastor Emil Kriewaldt. Essay presented at the South Australian District Convention, ELCA, held at Lobethal, South Australia, March 8-14, 1951. Proceedings, pp. 12-31).*

The doctrine of divine providence, which is dealt with at length in most books of dogmatics, usually succeeds the doctrines of God and Creation. This is a correct sequence, for, after dealing with the person and properties of God, it is logical to deal with His works - the creation and preservation of the universe. It is not only logical but also imperative to treat the doctrine of divine providence after the doctrine concerning God, for only he who has grasped and accepted what the Scriptures have revealed about God will be able to comprehend and accept the Scriptural teachings concerning His providence. The foregoing is borne out by the fact that those theologians who erred in respect to divine providence did so because they had not come to a right knowledge of God and His attributes.

Seeing, therefore, that the doctrine which we are considering is so closely connected with the doctrine of God and Creation, let us first very briefly review these doctrines. We need not first enquire whether God exists at all, a question which has exercised the minds of all philosophers and thinkers from the earliest times until to-day. The Christian takes that existence for granted, because it has been so clearly taught in the Word of God, and also because, even without that revelation, man can come to know that God exists and that He has certain properties. St. Paul writes of this natural knowledge of God in the first chapter of his Epistle to the Romans (Rom 1: 20, 21 and 25). Many pagan writers of ancient times reveal in their writings that they believed in the existence of a Supreme Being who sustains and governs the universe. By observing the richness, order, and designs of nature they reasoned that a powerful and planning intellect was behind it all.

The true God is one God, all-powerful, unlimited by time or space. In Deuteronomy (6: 4,5) we read, "Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God is one Lord; and thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might." That is the keynote of the Old Testament revelation of God. It reveals two great truths concerning God: that God is one, whole in Himself, complete and perfect; and that He is the only God, different from every false God, and false understanding of God, the one object of the worship of man. He is the Giver of life, and source of all life (Deut 32: 39,40).

God is the Creator of all things. He is eternal, omnipotent and omnipresent. Countless texts extol the power and wisdom of God. The Psalmist sings (Psalm 115: 3): "Our God is in the heavens; he hath done whatsoever he hath pleased." Psalm 147:5: "Great is our Lord, and of great power: his understanding is infinite." Abraham was asked (Gen 18: 14), "Is any thing too hard for the Lord?" Luke 1: 37 we read: "For with God nothing shall be impossible." And Luke 18: 27: "The things which are impossible with men are possible with God." Many more texts could be cited, but these must suffice.

All human speculation must be rejected. God's Word alone must guide us. We therefore reject the concepts of many modern writers who identify God with energy as philosophers thousands of years ago identified God with matter. God is not blind fate, or a "Sum of physical laws." It has been rightly said that God is a personal being, He is actuated by thoughts and plans, by judgements and desires. He "worketh all things after the counsel of his own will" (Eph 1: 11). "God has perfect intelligence, a mind, a will, a loving mighty heart."

It is this mighty, omniscient God who created the universe. "In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth." These words alone can answer the question over which the keenest minds have pondered through the ages, Whence came the world? Few indeed accept the answer supplied by the Scriptures. Many scientists either ignore the existence of God or definitely rule Him out as Creator. The evolutionistic interpretation of the origin of the world asserts that God did not create, but that evolution is

the process by which all things came into being as we know them. In fact, we are told that "it is necessary to abandon the creation doctrine."

Now it is true that these beliefs of ours cannot be proved like a mathematical equation. But if we consider the physical universe in its mystery and wonder, its order and intricacy, its awe-inspiring immensity, "we cannot escape the conclusion of a primary Creator." When we gaze at the stars "glittering in infinity" we, too, must say with the Psalmist: "The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament sheweth his handywork." We are seized by the overpowering conviction that such a cosmos could not have come into being through nothing more than blind chance. Our own world, whirling through space with measured rhythm, surely is more than a meaningless ball of matter thrown off by accident from the sun. "All evidence points to the inescapable fact that in Creation, in the motivation of the universe, and the operation of the natural laws there is, and always will be, a Supreme Intelligence."

This all-powerful God did not only create the universe, He also preserves and governs it. It would be strange indeed were the almighty Creator, after creating the world, to withdraw Himself and leave His creatures to their own devices. One can hardly conceive that God would use His omniscience and omnipotence to fashion the world and then take no more interest in it. Let us never doubt that He who created the world is also in control of it. This control is, as our theologians have pointed out, simply a continuation of the creation. We call this divine providence. In our essay we shall endeavour to probe into the providence of God and attempt to trace out its many ramifications. And as we attempt to fathom the deep things of God, let us do it with the prayer that God's Word alone guide us, and that we be restrained from idle speculation.

The subject to be treated, then, is this

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What is to be said on this subject may be summarized in the following theses or statements:

**I Evidence that God upholds, governs and directs the world is drawn from the Scriptures, and can also be drawn from nature and reason.**

**II. Divine Providence extends over all creatures in the kingdoms of power, grace, and glory, and over the entire creation.**

**III. Divine Providence manifests itself in a) God's preservation, b) in His co-operation, c) in His government of the whole universe.**

**IV. The motives prompting God to exercise His providence are His grace and mercy, as well as the helplessness and needs of His creatures.**

**V. The purposes or goals of divine providence are: a) the temporal and spiritual welfare of man, and b) the glorification of God.**

### **I**

"Divine Providence is that activity of God whereby He uninterruptedly upholds, governs, and directs the world which He has created." Prof. Fr. Bente.

The word "providence" is derived from the Latin word "providere," which means to foresee, namely, to see what will happen before it actually occurs. The word "providere" has also the applied, secondary meaning in classical Latin "to care for a thing, to be concerned with its welfare." Even so the word "providence" does not only mean to foresee, but also to care for, to "uphold" and "govern." It is possible, namely, that something is seen without making an impression on the beholder. Thus, for instance, animals often "see," and people with a sub-normal mentality. That cannot be said of God, however, for all that He sees will arouse either approbation or disapproval, love or anger in Him. God's providence is therefore more than a knowledge of what will take place in the future; it includes also His sovereign rule over His creatures. The church fathers said rightly that God did not act like a builder, who leaves the house he has completed, nor like a watchmaker who makes a watch, then winds it up, and lets it run down

without more ado. No, the world cannot maintain itself, it depends on God for its continued existence and growth. We confess, therefore, with Luther in the explanation of the First Article: "I believe that God has made me and all creatures ... and still preserves them; that He richly and daily provides me with all that I need to support this body and life; that He defends me against all danger, guards and protects me from all evil."

The fact that the world is preserved and governed by God can be deduced by reason and by evidence drawn from nature. But reason and nature, however, can only reveal these truths in barest outline. The Bible alone can give us a clear exposition of these truths. We shall therefore turn to the Word of God first in order to learn what it says of the nature of divine providence. A thousand texts could be quoted, and hundreds of examples cited, all referring to God's preservation and government of His creatures. We shall give a number. Col 1: 16, 17: "For by him were all things created ... visible and invisible ... and he is before all things, and by him all things consist (cohere, hold together)." If God did not hold all things together they would disintegrate. Hebr 1: 3: He upholds "all things by the word of his power." Acts 17: 25: "He giveth to all life, and breath, and all things." And verse 28: "In him we live, and move, and have our being." Jer 23: 24: "Do I not fill heaven and earth? saith the Lord." Psalm 33: "The Lord looketh from heaven; he beholdeth all the sons of men. From the place of his habitation he looketh upon all the inhabitants of the earth. He fashioneth their hearts alike; he considereth all their works." (All things and all the affairs of men are in His hands, subject to His control and direction.) Psalm 73: 23, 24: "Thou hast holden me by my right hand. Thou shalt guide me with thy counsel." Psalm 145: 9, 15, 16: "The Lord is good to all: and his tender mercies are over all his works. The eyes of all wait upon thee; and thou givest them their meat in due season. Thou openest thine hand and satisfiest the desire of every living thing." Matt 6: 26ff: "Behold the fowls of the air," etc., and Matt 10: 29, 30: "Are not two sparrows sold for a farthing? and one of them shall not fall on the ground without your Father. But the very hairs of your head are all numbered."

Divine providence is also clearly proved by arguments based on reason. He who believes in the existence of God must logically also believe in the sovereignty of God, that God exercises control over the whole universe.

If God does not govern the world and direct it according to His will, this would be due to one of four reasons:

1. God is remote from the world. If that were true then God would not be omnipresent.
2. God is near to the world but knows nothing of the world. Then God is not omniscient.
3. God knows of the world but is unwilling to interfere in the course of the world. Then God is morally indifferent, cares neither for right or wrong.
4. God would like to interfere, but is unable to do so. Then He is not omnipotent. In short, if there were no providence there would be no God.

The world-famous author, Dr. A.J. Cronin, gives an interesting account of the manner in which he came to believe in the existence and providence of God. He relates that while he was studying medicine at the University of Glasgow he regarded man as no more than a complex machine. "None of the autopsies showed anything I could identify with an immortal soul. When I thought of God it was with a superior smile, indicative of scorn for an outworn myth." He then describes how he turned from his agnosticism to a belief in a personal God through his own varied experiences. He became less self-assured. "I realized that the compass of existence held more than my textbooks had revealed." He considered the origin of the world and concluded: "We cannot escape the notion of a primary Creator. I am faced merely with the choice between two alternatives: Accident or design? Chaos or creation? There is no valid basis for denying the existence of God. Rather is one driven to conclude that in primordial creation, in the motivation of the universe and the operation of the natural laws there is, has been, and always will be a Supreme Intelligence."

Since the fall, however, man's reason has become darkened and, therefore, if we had to depend upon our reason we would learn but little of God's providence. After all, it is an article of faith. The Scriptures alone can give us on its sacred pages a revelation of God's providence.

Some have denied that God exercises divine providence because it is said that God "rested on the seventh day from all his works" (Gen 2: 2). However, we must distinguish between human and divine rest. Luther said rightly that these words mean that God ceased creating, but did not cease from the work of preservation and governing (St. Louis I: 91ff, quoted in Pieper's Dogmatics). St. Augustine says aptly: "God knows how to work while resting, and rest while working."

The evidence for divine providence from nature is lucid and convincing. This is a vast field, worthy of being treated at length, but we shall be brief.

The book of nature tells us in large, clear letters of its wonders. Sir Isaac Newton, one of the greatest scientists of all times, referring to this, said: "The wonderful arrangement of the solar system can only be the work of an Almighty Being." Kepler, the great Lutheran astronomer, said as he gazed enraptured at the stars: "I thank Thee, my Creator and Lord, that Thou hast given me the joy to behold Thy creation, and the rapture over the work of Thine hands."

Every new discovery in the field of science gives us a fresh glimpse of the matchless glory of our God. We could mention many but we shall mention only one. Just recently Dr. Donald Griffin, of Cornell University, set out to determine how so humble a creature as the bat manages to manoeuvre safely at night without colliding with any obstacles in the line of flight. By means of the modern cathode ray oscillograph, he was able to determine that the bat in flight emits spurts of ultrasonic sound of a pitch measured at 120,000 cycles per second, and during the intervals listens for echoes which betray the proximity of any objects. No human ear can detect such high-pitched sounds, but God thus wisely provided for the needs of this creature. Hundreds of other examples of God's wisdom have been discovered by scientists, and, no doubt, many more will be noted in the future. What wonderful evidence of divine providence! Jean Henri Fabre, the famous entomologist, whom Darwin called "the incomparable observer," when asked whether he believed in God said, "No, I do not believe in God - I see Him everywhere."

## II

### Divine Providence - Its Scope

"Divine providence extends over the entire creation. It provides for the continued existence of all individual creatures, directs their actions, and controls their destinies." Prof. Bente.

Vast, indeed, is the scope of divine providence. It embraces all creatures, it extends over the lifeless creation, it includes all that concerns men. Truly, the Lord God omnipotent reigneth!

Dr. C. Loeber in his dogmatics deals with the scope of God's providence by showing how God exerts it in His threefold kingdom, the kingdom of power, the kingdom of grace, and the kingdom of glory.

In the kingdom of glory, the habitation of the angels and the departed saints, there is fullness of joy and pleasures for evermore. God provides them with eternal and supreme bliss and happiness. Rev 7: 17: "For the Lamb which is in the midst of the throne shall feed them, and shall lead them unto living fountains of waters: and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes." Would that we could gaze but for a moment at or sojourn in this kingdom, how immeasurably would not our faith in providence be strengthened!

The kingdom of power is also controlled by divine providence. Let us notice first how in that kingdom the lifeless creation is the object of God's foresight and care. God, speaking to Job, says: "Who hath divided a watercourse for the overflowing of waters, or a way for the lightning of thunder; to cause it to rain on the earth, where no man is ... Hath the rain a father? or who hath begotten the drops of dew? (Job

38: 25-28). Job declares that God makes the weight for the winds (Job 28: 25), namely, how strongly the wind shall blow. The Psalmist states, "Thou rulest the raging of the sea" (Psalm 89: 9). Truly, nothing occurs that providence does not extend to it. (The story of the destruction of the Spanish Armada illustrates the above very clearly.) It is therefore not ridiculous, as so many claim, if the Christian prays for rain in time of drought. On the contrary, such a prayer is pleasing in the sight of the Lord.

God also cares for the trees, shrubs, and plants growing on earth. The Psalmist sings: "He causeth the grass to grow for the cattle, and herb for the service of man." The Saviour said that God clothes the grass of the field (Matt 6: 30).

The same is true of the entire animal world. In the creation God gave the herbivorous animals their food. God said, "I have given every green herb for meat." In the 145th Psalm we read: "The eyes of all wait upon thee; and thou givest them their meat in due season. Thou openest thine hand, and satisfiest the desire of every living thing." And in the 147th Psalm: "He giveth to the beast his food, and to the young ravens which cry." In the Book of Jonah we are told that one reason why God spared Nineveh was because of the cattle in the city (Jonah 4: 11). We see also God's concern for the animals in the fact that the evil spirits were not able to enter into the Gadarene swine until they had received the consent of the Master. Even the sparrow receives from God "life, and breath, and all things" (Acts 17). A passing thought: Would that man would remember how God cares for dumb creatures. His own treatment of them would improve immeasurably.

God's providence, however, concerns itself chiefly with man. "In him we live, and move, and have our being" (Acts 17: 27, 28). He gives man food and clothing. He sends rain, and "fruitful seasons, filling our hearts with food and gladness" (Acts 14: 17). He numbers all the hair upon our heads (Matt 10: 30). "He maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and the unjust" (Matt 5: 45). God has made man, in spite of his unworthiness, the chief concern and prime object of His providence. Each individual from the moment of his conception until his death is under the surveillance (watched over by) of God. Job declares that God fashioned him (Job 10: 8-10). This truth is repeated Psalm 71: 6 and Psalm 139, vv 13, 15, 16. In Psalm 91 man is pictured as spending his life under the protecting wings of providence. And finally, God determines the hour of his death.

It should be well noted that God directs the course of each individual's life. To each man God has appointed his particular task and work. So that he can carry out this task God gives him all the gifts that he requires. The life story of Moses illustrates this very clearly. God chose Moses to lead the children of Israel out of the land of bondage. To prepare him for this task God equipped him with the necessary gifts as well as giving him the training in his parental home and at the court of Pharaoh which he needed for the task. Doctor Martin Luther also was chosen by God to lead the Church out of spiritual bondage. As we study his life we can clearly trace God's finger directing and protecting his life and work. Step by step God led him to that work which He had appointed him to do. God also has work for every one of us. Let us not try to evade it, but rather seek to find the work He has appointed us to do.

The third kingdom which is under the providence of God is the kingdom of grace. This kingdom is inhabited by the saints on earth. God's children are the chief concern of His providence. The Psalmist declares (Psalm 33), "Behold, the eye of the Lord is upon them that fear him." In the thirty-fourth Psalm we read: "They that seek the Lord shall not want any good thing." The words of the 37th Psalm are comforting indeed, "I have been young, and now am old; yet have I not seen the righteous forsaken, nor his seed begging bread." The disciples of Jesus had little, and often complained about it, yet when Jesus asked them: "When I sent you without purse, and scrip, and shoes, lacked ye any thing?" they had to reply: "Nothing." Let us therefore never doubt God's goodness, let us never despair. St. Paul assures us: "He is the Saviour of all men, especially of those that believe." You are God's child. A true father will first of all provide for his children and then for others. Even so God will first satisfy your needs. Yes, even on the last day while fire destroys the world, the child of God will stand unharmed.

Before going on to the next thesis let us consider a question which is frequently asked when men survey the field over which divine providence extends. It is the question: Does God exercise sov'reign care over

all His creatures, even the small and unimportant ones? Many find it impossible to believe that God concerns Himself with minute or despised creatures. They may readily admit that God directs great and important matters, but that He should exercise the same care over small and insignificant animals and matters appears unreasonable and even ridiculous to them. The manoeuvring of an army, they say, might well be an object of His direction, but not the welfare of a mouse. Even a famous church father, Jerome, fell into this error. In his commentary on the Prophet Habakkuk he writes: "It is beneath the dignity of God that He should know how many gnats have been born, and how many have died, or the number of bugs, lice, and fleas that are living on earth at a given moment; or how many fish there are in the sea." Let us not throw a stone at Jerome, for surely we are not without sin. How many of us have not had similar thoughts? We say: I can well believe that a man like Dr. Luther should enjoy the special care of God, but someone as unimportant as I am cannot expect it. Have we not often regarded certain cares or problems as being too unimportant and trivial to bring them before God in prayer? How often have we not regarded it as unnecessary to thank God for minor benefits? If we had unfalteringly believed that God's providence is concerned with all things, the great and the small, we would have acted otherwise. No, only he who never has anxious cares, who never worries, who never complains, who never has fightings and fears can lift up his hands in pious disapproval.

That God's providence concerns itself with minute matters is clearly taught in Holy Writ. The Lord Himself spoke of it when He said: "Are not two sparrows sold for a farthing? and one of them shall not fall on the ground without your Father. But the very hairs of your head are all numbered."

Several essayists of the Missouri Synod have summarized the reasons why God's control extends even to the smallest and most trifling matters, so that which seems ridiculous at first glance is perfectly logical and inevitable.

1. If God is honoured by creating little things - gnats, sparrows, worms - He is honoured also by preserving them. If He took the pains to create swallows and rabbits, why should He decline to concern Himself with preserving them?

2. Before God nothing is small, nothing is great. To distinguish between small and great, honourable and dishonourable, important and unimportant, when considering creation from the point of view of God, is to think of God in the way we think of men.

3. God is present everywhere, and that entirely. Since God cannot be divided, He is altogether present within and without each creature - the smallest leaf or insect and the greatest forest or animal. How, then, can the preservation of the least be of less concern to Him than of the greatest?

4. It is a great error to think that the energy or the strength of God is in any way reduced by preserving hosts of creatures. Finite mind and finite strength are exhausted by trifles. The infinite mind and power find activity no drain upon their strength or resources. To illustrate: The sun is no more weakened by shining upon a molehill than upon a mountain.

5. If God did not control small things, He could not uphold and direct large matters, for large matters always consist of a great number of details. How would the garments of Israel have lasted for forty years in the desert if God had not cared for the individual threads? How would He maintain the race of sparrows if He did not consider the individual birds? How could He direct the course of wars if He had no control over the individual bullet? How govern a pestilence or an epidemic if the germs that cause the disease were beyond His control or outside His interest?

6. Nor can we say that small things are of no import. They can have the most important consequences. All the world is atremble to-day because man has unleashed the power of the atom - an object so small that only a trained scientist can form a concept of it. (For want of a nail a shoe was lost, for want of a shoe a horse was lost, for want of a horse a message was lost - battle - kingdom, etc.)

It is true that such rational arguments will never persuade anyone to believe God's providence in small, trivial matters. It remains an article of faith. Only he who bows humbly before the Word of God and becomes as a little child will be willing to accept the truth: "Love which finds no sacrifice too great, finds no trifle too small." Because God's love is so great it concerns itself with all things, even the most minute.

O that we would never lose sight of this wonderful truth! We would then trust God with a childlike faith, cast all our cares upon Him, the small, as well as the great, and we would then experience the solace and peace a little child enjoys when it is resting on its mother's lap.

### III The Mode of Divine Providence

We shall now enter the inner sanctuary of the doctrine of divine providence and cast a glance at God's secret workshop. We shall get but a glimpse, and therefore many questions will remain unanswered. We ask: How does His providence work, or how does it manifest itself? I shall give the answer supplied by the Lutheran dogmaticians. They state that it manifests itself in particular a) in His gracious preservation, b) in His gracious co-operation with all that occurs, c) in His gracious direction and government of the whole universe. J.T. Mueller writes in his Dogmatics: "We distinguish as special acts of divine providence: God's preservation (Psalm 36: 6), God's concurrence (Acts 17: 28), and God's government (Jer 10: 23 and Prov 20: 24)." We shall consider each one separately.

a) For the preservation of his life man needs food, clothing and shelter. The questions, What shall we eat, what shall we drink, wherewithal shall we be clothed? therefore occupy much of his time and thought. It is God, however, who must supply the means that support our body and life. Luther has rightly stated in his explanation of the First Article that God supplies us with all that we need to support this body and life, such as food and drink, clothing and shoes, house and home, and that God opens His hand and provides us with all that we need for our temporal life. And God supplies in rich measure, not niggardly or sparingly. "Thou openest thine hand" suggests not parsimony, but opulence, abundance.

Sometimes God provides our sustenance in a supernatural manner. When the children of Israel journeyed to the Promised Land God supplied them daily with manna and meat, and at times a hard rock was made to supply them with the necessary water. In a wonderful way He preserved their shoes and clothing so that during the forty years they did not wear out. At the Brook Cherith the Prophet Elijah was fed by ravens, and later at Sarepta, he and a woman and her son lived for three years on a handful of meal and a little oil - about enough ordinarily for one meal. In the wilderness Jesus fed the five thousand with five barley loaves and two small fishes. He was able to do this because to the Creator size or numbers do not matter, and He can change the laws of nature.

Normally, however, we are to earn our food and clothing by our own labours. "In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread," God said to Adam and thereby showed him how he should provide for his sustenance. The Apostle Paul also taught this when he wrote: "If any would not work, neither should he eat." Let no one think that through his work he provides the means for his own preservation. No, it is God who through those means supplies them. When Dr. Luther on one occasion watched cattle and sheep being driven to the pasture he said, "There go the milk-carriers, butter-carriers, and wool-carriers, - they are preachers who preach daily that we are to believe in God, that He cares for us, and that He will feed us."

O let us thank God for His preservation of us and all creatures. The Psalmist says: "It is a good thing to give thanks unto the Lord." May this truth also lead us to trust in God. If God cares for us why should we burden our hearts with foolish and sinful cares? Psalm 103: 13 and 1 Peter 5: 7. All our anxious cares cannot provide us with a single grain of wheat. Therefore trust in Him, He knoweth that you have need of all these things and He will provide them.

Let us hear what Luther writes about the doctrine of preservation. He writes: "God is not like the carpenter or builder, who, when he has completed the building of a ship, hands it over to the sailors and then goes his own way. God does not act like that, but, having created the world by His word, also preserves it. For, even as we are created without any co-operation on our part, even so we cannot preserve ourselves. Even as heaven, earth, moon, stars, man, and all that lives were created in the beginning by the Word, even so they are through the Word governed and preserved. How long would the sun and the heavenly bodies continue on their course if God did not direct them? It would be impossible for people to be fruitful, to conceive children; for the earth to yield fruit; for the sea to yield fish; in short, for animals and plants to increase and multiply if they were not upheld by God's divine power. And if God were to withdraw His hand all would fall into a heap. The sun would not remain in the heavens, no child would be born, no blade of grass would grow if God were not active ... Even as we are not able to create ourselves even so we cannot by our own powers preserve our life for a single hour. Should the Creator, who is constantly at work, withdraw His hand from His co-workers then all would fall into ruin ... Therefore we are not to believe what some heretics have advanced that God created the world and then allowed nature to go its own way, and that He does not control it. That is not only opposed to the Scriptures, but also to experience. And this is the most important part of the Creation that we know and believe that God preserves that which He has created. Therefore when St. John says, "All that is made is made by the Word of God," we are to understand this to mean that the same Word which created all things also preserves them; otherwise they would not remain in existence very long" (VII, 1421-25).

b) God's concurrence or co-operation (*Kraeftigung*, *Concursus*). Even as all creatures have received their being from God, so they receive from Him the power to think, work, and act. Without this concurrence or co-operation of God all creatures would be powerless, completely incapable of doing even the simplest act. The lifeless creation also depends on God for its activity. Psalm 104: 3 we read: "Who maketh the clouds his chariot: who walketh upon the wings of the wind." Job 38: 28: "Who hath begotten the drops of dew?" The answer is, of course, God. Yes, God must co-operate with His creatures, or they can do nothing. Acts 17: 28: "In him we live, and move, and have our being."

This co-operation of God is exercised through certain means which theologians call secondary causes to distinguish them from God, who is the Prime Cause. Through these causes or means God preserves and directs all that He has made. When therefore something is done both God and the means are operative, both work together. In Psalm 65: 9-11 we are shown how God is operative. "Thou visitest the earth, and waterest it; thou greatly enrichest it with the river of God, which is full of water; thou preparest them corn, when thou hast so provided for it. Thou waterest the ridges thereof abundantly; thou settlest the furrows thereof; thou makest it soft with showers; thou blessest the springing thereof. Thou crownest the year with thy goodness; and thy paths drop fatness." In Isa. 55 we are shown that the means are operative. "For as the rain cometh down, and the snow from heaven, and returneth not thither, but watereth the earth, and maketh it bring forth and bud, that it may give seed to the sower, and bread to the eater," etc. We have seen, therefore, that Scripture clearly teaches that both are operative - God and the means. Psalm 127: "Except the Lord build the house, they labour in vain that build it." This also shows how both operate together, the Lord builds and the labourers build.

The relationship, however, of divine providence and such secondary causes to each other must be very carefully noted, lest we fall into grievous error. As soon as we allow our reason to control our thinking we shall fall either into the Scylla of Deism which rules out God's concurrence altogether, or into the Charybdis of Pantheism, which teaches that the creature is actually God, and so God is made responsible for the evil that exists in the world. What is this relationship? In divine concurrence both God works and the means work, as stated above, but the secondary causes "are not co-ordinate with God, but rather subordinate to God so that the secondary causes work only so far and so long as God works through them (Psalm 127: 1)." The moment God ceases to co-operate the secondary causes lose all efficacy. Dr. Pieper expresses it like this: "We may indeed speak of a natural character, movement, power, and effect of the creatures. But what is natural to the creature - that the worm crawls, man walks erect, the sun shines, a tree grows and bears fruit according to its kind, that medicine cures, bread nourishes, a watchman protects, etc. - is God's influence upon the creatures" (Christ. Dog. I p 592). We must be careful not to separate the working of God from the Working of the means, as if there were two separate workings and

not one working. One and the same action is ascribed entirely to God and entirely to the creature. Nor are we to regard them as separated in time as if God acted first and gave the creature a certain power which it subsequently exerts by its own strength. Two examples are commonly employed to illustrate this co-operation. The electric magnet is like a dead piece of iron and cannot attract until the electric current passes through the induction coil. Writing is done with a pen and one's hand - not half by the pen and half by the hand, but entirely by the pen and entirely by the hand. The example of a storage battery which must first be charged is a wrong analogy. It will always remain a mystery, one of the deep things of God which the human mind is incapable of fathoming completely.

A number of practical lessons can be learned from the above. First we are shown very forcibly how much we depend on God, that without Him we can do nothing. It furthermore teaches us that God is our Creator and our real Father. Dr. Pieper expressed it as follows: "Though from our parents as secondary causes we receive our souls and also our bodies with all their parts, yet we know that God is our true Creator and Father." We also learn that it is God who sustains our life, for if He did not give our food strength it could not nourish us. This is also true when we are ill. The drugs and herbs which the physician prescribes could not help us if God had not instilled their healing properties in them. The drugs without God's co-operation are powerless and cannot heal us. The physician spoke truth who said: "I have bound you up, but God healed you." How necessary, therefore, that we at such times implore God to help! Yes, all the blessings we receive come from God through secondary causes.

c) Thirdly, God's providence manifests itself in His gracious direction and government of the whole universe.

The first article expresses it as follows: "That He defends me against all danger, and guards and protects me from all evil."

A lengthy book could be written to elaborate this theme; however, we shall be brief, and rather deal with a number of practical problems that arise as we ponder over God's preservation and government. (Dr. Nickel has written an essay, "The Miraculous and Mysterious Government of God," which covers thirty-three printed pages.)

Hundreds of passages of Scripture could be quoted which teach that "the Lord God omnipotent reigneth." In Psalm 91 we read: He that dwelleth in the secret place of the most high shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty. Surely He shall deliver thee from the snare of the fowler and from the noisome pestilence. Psalm 121: I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills, etc. In 16th and 19th chapters of the Book of Proverbs we are told that God rules all our thoughts, words, and actions, that He controls everything with His wisdom and power. Psalm 73: 24 and Psalm 139: 1-5 tell us that all our undertakings are guided by Him. Yes, all God's creatures are under His sovereign care. He is concerned with the welfare of all. Already at their conception He co-operated (Jer. 1: 5: Before I formed thee I knew thee; also Psalm 71: 6). And throughout our life the mighty hand of God directs us. He it was who chose Levi the publican to become an apostle. The whole life of St. Paul proves and manifests God's guidance. A short quotation from Dr. Nickel's essay will be in place. He writes: "Ask all members of a Christian family, father, mother, parents and children, what they believe of God's government and they will answer you, 'The Lord hath helped us hitherto by His surpassing favour. His mercies every morn were new. His kindness did not waver. God hitherto hath been our guide, hath pleasures hitherto supplied and hitherto hath helped us.' Ask our Christian boys who returned from the front what they believe of God's government, and with one voice they will answer, 'God has been our shield and our protection. Christ, our Saviour, has been with us at sea and in the air, in the trenches, on the battlefield, and in the jungle. He helped us many a time to escape dangers; His angels surrounded us and the wings of His mercy did shade us.' God has performed great miracles and still shows us to-day that our lives are in His hands, and that He governs and leads us."

God's government is especially clearly seen when He protects us and wards off danger. Divine protection is usually vouchsafed us in two ways. Frequently He prevents the danger from coming near us, and we are unaware that we have been in jeopardy.

Accident statistics reveal how hazardous modern life has become. Hundreds of people are killed each year in road accidents alone. Every time we cross the street, every time we go on a journey our life is placed in jeopardy. A pertinent question: Do we always recognize this and thank God for His protection when we have returned safely?

The second way which God employs is that He uses extra-ordinary measures to protect us, and His intervention is readily seen. The newspapers record such occurrences practically in every issue. Someone falls from a great height and escapes unhurt. Cars collide and are damaged, but the occupants escape with only a few scratches. People then say, "That was a lucky escape," yet, strictly speaking, they are anything but accidents. It was God's providence in action, and we should acknowledge it as such. The Bible furnishes many examples. Two well-known examples are the stories of Joseph and Queen Esther. The late Dr. Maier relates a story from his own father's life which clearly illustrates God's care. He writes: "Once while travelling in the mountains of Switzerland, he lost his way and was overtaken by nightfall far away from his destination. He pushed on in the darkness as best as he could, until an inner voice suddenly urged him to stop. He obeyed that impulse and slept under the dark cover of a starless Alpine sky. Can you picture his horror, and above that his gratitude to God, when, awaking with the early sunlight, he found that he had slept through the night on a cliff within only a few feet of the edge that overhung a deep ravine? The fact that he was spared and that as one of the many consequences I was granted life and being is not the result of blind chance nor a stroke of fortune, good or bad. Like many similar instances it is the fulfilment of hundreds of passages in which God who redeems our life from destruction pledges, 'I am continually with thee.' His protecting love is so pure and perfect that it can turn sorrows into rejoicing, money losses into spiritual gain, retreats into progress. God loves us unswervingly and surrounds our souls with complete protection." The late Dr. Walther had booked his passage to the United States on the "Amalia." He was prevented from travelling on this ship and so sailed a few days earlier on the "Johann Georg." The "Amalia" was lost at sea; it was never heard of again. Thus God saved the life of a man for whom he had a special task. Many similar stories could be related which bear out how God keeps His promise: "He shall deliver thee in six troubles, yea, in seven there shall no evil touch thee" (Job 5: 19). Probably there are some here to-day who could add their personal testimony and relate from their own experience how wonderfully God protected them in the hour of peril.

God's government extends not only to individuals, it also extends to nations. In the first place He gives each nation its own particular government. "The powers that be are ordained of God" states the Epistle to the Romans (Rom. 13: 1,2). He sets kings over them (1 Sam. 16). He sometimes deposes them. When war breaks out God is not indifferent as to its outcome. Psalm 46: 10; 2 Chron. 20: 12ff. Above all thrones is God's throne. The rulers of the earth must carry out God's plans.

A famous modern historian, Prof. Herbert Butterfield, has written an outstanding book, entitled "Christianity and History." This Cambridge University professor attacks those who "see no divine scheme or purpose in history." Some of his statements are worthy of being repeated. In chapter V, in which he deals with "Providence and the Historical Process," he has this to say: "In a sense everything with which we deal when we are discussing Christianity and history - judgement, cataclysm, progress, and tragic conflict - must be a commentary on the ways of Providence." Further on he writes: "A very considerable part of the attention of historians is concentrated in fact upon that kind of history-making which goes on, so to speak, over our heads, now deflecting the results of our actions, now taking our purposes out of our hands, and now turning our endeavours to ends not realized." "Ranke, one of the greatest analysts of the historical process, more than once called attention to something subtle in history which remained at the finish as a sort of residuum, unexplained." "There is a providence that we must regard as lying in the very constitution of things."

"In the workings of history there must be felt the movement of a living God."

Let us now briefly consider the questions which inevitably arise in our minds when we ponder over the mode of divine providence.

Since we claim on the basis of Scripture that God controls the thoughts and acts of men, can one under such circumstances still speak of human freedom of action and of human responsibility? Is man really a free agent? Can one not say that God, at least in part, becomes responsible for man's evil actions? We reply that it is certainly true that among the secondary causes which God uses to govern the world are also men, both good and evil men. King Herod quite unwittingly became the means whereby God fulfilled His prophecy regarding Jesus: "Out of Egypt have I called my Son." The Jews also carried out God's determinate counsel when they crucified the Saviour. Nevertheless, the Bible teaches very clearly that every man is fully responsible for his own acts. God will judge the world in righteousness. Now, God would not judge a man if he were not responsible nor accountable for his actions. It would be an injustice on God's part were he to condemn a man for his misdeeds for which He Himself is responsible. When David prayed: "Enter not into judgement with thy servant, for in thy sight shall no man living be justified" he acknowledged that he was responsible for every word that he uttered, and for every act that he committed. The activity also of man's conscience is a powerful proof that man is a responsible being. St. Paul writes: "Their thoughts the mean while accusing or else excusing one another," Rom. 2: 15. How are we to reconcile these utterances of the Scriptures? No answer will fully satisfy, for here we are confronted with a mystery which will not be fully resolved until we see God face to face. The usual answer given is that God does not always force men to do His will. He sets before them a choice between evil and good and then stimulates the choice of good. Thus, God gave Adam the choice between obedience and disobedience. He could have prevented Adam and Eve from sinning, but allowed them freedom of will. Since then man has lost his ability to choose in spiritual matters; however, in matters pertaining to civic righteousness God preserved in man the ability to choose. That is why men have sometimes reformed their lives and turned from evil ways to good even though they were not converted. Most men, however, abuse this freedom of choice. They take a delight in wickedness and resist the truth to which their conscience testifies - they are therefore without excuse (Rom. 1: 20).

Even though this explanation does not fully answer the question how it is possible for man's activity to be entirely dependent on God and yet be able to flout the will of God, let us follow Luther's advice and humbly remove our hats and say: "The Holy Spirit is wiser than I."

Closely related to the question of human freedom is the question also whether God should not be regarded as the cause of sin, seeing that He controls man's actions and gives him the power to commit sinful acts. It may be thought that since God does not prevent a man from doing wrong, and by His concurrence actually works in man while he sins. He makes Himself a participator in his sin. To give a concrete example: A thief will plan how to break into a house. He then commits the crime and steals a number of articles. Now, he could not have carried out his felonious act if God had not kept the thief's mind, eyes, and hands, operative, and supplied them with the power to act. Is not God therefore as guilty as the criminal? A difficult problem. indeed! To this problem also, God has not given us a complete answer, but He has revealed enough in His Holy Word to show that this sin cannot be laid at His door. Dr. Pieper has summarized the Biblical statements as follows:

1. God does not want sin, but with all His holy nature is opposed to sin. To prevent sin God gave His holy Law.
2. God often thwarts the evil intentions of others. Thus He kept Abimelech from sinning (Gen. 20: 1ff). He turned Balaam's intention to curse into a blessing.
3. God makes a sin which has actually been committed to serve a good end, as in the sale of Joseph (Gen. 50: 20).
4. God sometimes permits sin as a punishment for sin (Rom. 1: 23,24).

We must also note the difference in regard to the nature of the influence which God exerts in regard to good and evil actions. Good acts God commands, aids, approves (Rom. 2: 15). In regard to evil acts it is true that while they are being performed there is a general concursus of God in so far as they are acts. God sustained in Eve's hand the power of locomotion. God only supplies the capability to commit an action, He does not "work along in determining the direction the acts take, kill, steal, etc." In Dogmatics the former is called the materiale of the action, the latter the formale. "God supplies the materiale, which in itself is neither good nor evil; men supply the formale, which gives character to the activity" (Bente).

Dr. Pieper says rightly that this distinction between the formale and materiale cannot satisfy our reason. However, it sets the limits within which we must confine our thinking. If we think that we can go farther we either deceive ourselves, or we deny one of the following truths, 1. God co-operates even when actions are evil: this was denied by Pelagius, who claimed that he could move his hand without the concursus of God; 2. Man is responsible for all his actions. Those who deny these truths contradict the Scriptures and also experience. That the thief or the murderer cannot act without God's concurrence even when they are committing a crime is clearly taught, Acts 17: 28, where it is said of all men that they live, move, and exist in God. That also includes thieves and murderers. Experience proves also that thieves and murderers are condemned by their consciences when they violate its norm. All pantheistic phrases that man is not responsible for his actions because God granted existence, and power and motion to do them, are disproved by the fact that conscience condemns wrongful actions (Pieper).

We shall now consider another question which is also related to the foregoing questions: Must things happen as they do, or can they be varied? Will things take place as they are destined to occur, no matter what we do? Should we accept fatalism as the only logical philosophy of life?

This is also a question which is most difficult to answer. We shall let Dr. Pieper give the answer. The Scriptures, says Dr. Pieper, teach us to hold both the immutable fixation of all things and man's responsibility. All depends on the point of view. When we consider how things happen from the point of view of divine majesty, we must say that they are all immutably fixed. Thus Scriptures tell us: "For of a truth against thy holy child Jesus, whom thou hast anointed, both Herod, and Pontious Pilate, with the Gentiles, and the people of Israel, were gathered together, for to do whatsoever thy hand and thy counsel determined before to be done" (Acts 4: 27,28). From the point of view of God it was all predetermined. Again, when Peter attempted to free Jesus, he was told: "Thus it must be" that the Scriptures might be fulfilled (Matt. 26: 54). From the point of view of man, however, we must, according to the Scriptures, recognize that things happen contingently, that "events can be modified and depend on circumstances and upon decisions that we make, for which decisions we are responsible." Christ tried to dissuade both Judas and Pilate from carrying out their evil intentions. That the words of Jesus had a profound effect on Pilate is clearly seen by the fact that: "From henceforth Pilate sought to release him." Accordingly, Christ instructs His disciples, when persecution comes, not to attempt to view the outcome from the point of view of divine providence and to deliver themselves over to the persecutors as Christ did, but to flee into another city (Matt. 10: 23). Therefore, the Apostle Paul did all he could to escape the net of his enemies in order that he could continue his work. (Damascus - let down in a basket.)

This twofold point of view must be firmly maintained lest we fall into the pit of atheism and Epicureanism (that things happen without God) or into the ditch of Stoicism and fatalism (rejection of means ordained by God). We should therefore act according to the following principles: We must use the means which God has put at our disposal. Therefore when we are ill we should avail ourselves of the physician's skill. In order to obtain the necessities of life we should engage in daily occupation. To obtain salvation, we should make diligent use of the means of grace. "Any attempt to search out divine providence apart from the means which God has ordained is folly and wicked presumption" (Bente). Let us not try to enter a field which God has closed to us.

The above principles should also be applied when we consider the question in regard to the length or end of life. On the one hand the Scriptures teach that the end of life of every man has been immutably fixed. "His days are determined, the number of his months are with thee, thou hast appointed his bounds that he cannot pass" (Job 14: 5). On the other hand the Bible also teaches that man's life can be shortened or prolonged. Sometimes He extends the term of life of a Christian in order to reward him, or He curtails it so that he may escape some evil which would otherwise befall him. King Josiah was told: "Behold, I will gather thee to thy fathers, and thou shalt be gathered to thy grave in peace, neither shall thine eyes see all the evil that I will bring upon this place." King Hezekiah had his life lengthened fifteen years. The evil sometimes have their lives shortened by God. Psalm 55 states that "Bloody and deceitful men shall not live out half their days." Dr. Pieper says that both, the immutable fixed terminus vitae and the prolongation and shortening of life, are to be accepted as true. The former is stated from the point of

view of God, the latter from the point of view of man (Dog I, p 599). He adds that it is gracious condescension on the part of God that He speaks to us concerning the hour of death from the human point of view and directs us to those means which He has ordained for the preservation of life. Such divinely-ordained means are: work (Psalm 128: 2); food (Acts 27: 33-36); under certain conditions the use of wine; a godly life (Eph 6: 3); prayer (Hezekiah's prayer); and flight from danger (Paul's flight from Damascus). Calvinists deny the above, claiming that God has fixed immutably our span of life without consideration of future happenings. To sum up: God's government controls all His creatures, it embraces every individual and all groups of people; it guides the destiny of every man and every nation. Let us trust this mighty, wise, and gracious King (Psalm 46).

A short discussion of the concept of miracles is not out of place at this juncture. Many modern theologians deny the possibility of miracles, for, they declare, "The laws of nature are inflexible and unchangeable. There are no violations of the laws of nature, such as miracles imply." They try to explain the miraculous happenings recorded in the Bible as being the results of natural causes, or else they simply regard them as part of an ancient mythology. Prof. A. Harnack wrote: "While there is plenty of the miraculous, there are no miracles. Miracles cannot happen." We reply: If there is an almighty God who has created all things, and in His infinite mercy governs all things to the minutest detail, if God's will controls the laws of nature, it is surely not unreasonable to believe that now and then God does things which are contrary to the laws of nature. God, the law-giver, is above the laws He ordained, He is not bound to the laws of nature; He can use them as He pleases. When the great Reformed theologian Vinet was dying, he said, "I was dead, and I live. I was blind, and I see. I was a slave, and I am free. I was enemy of God, and now I love Him. Behold the miracle! If God has been able to work that one miracle, there is none of which He is not capable."

For similar reasons modern theologians deny the efficacy of prayer. Several years ago Prof. Murdoch stated in one of his syndicated articles that he who expects through prayer to make God change his intentions is like the savage who tries by means of sacrifices to secure benefits from his idols. He remarked that prayer had but one benefit, it spurred the suppliant on to greater activity. The child of God will cling to the numerous promises of the Scriptures which affirm that God does hear and answer every proper prayer. These texts are so well known that we need not quote them.

Let us briefly regard the relationship between the providence of God and war. Frequently during the horrors of the war years, we heard men say, Where is your God in these days? Men would like to believe that Coventry or Hiroshima could not be the work of God. They would like to believe that God produces only the enjoyable moments of life; and when God allows pain, disaster and death we murmur and complain and doubt His providence. The forty-sixth Psalm, however, states: "Come, behold the works of the Lord, what desolations he hath made in the earth." The misery and the destruction of warfare during those bitter years was wholly and altogether the doing of God. It happened according to His plan. He made the desolation. But why did God do it? He made it for a purpose. "Be still and know that I am God; I will be exalted among the heathen; I will be exalted in the earth." That is His purpose. Men should recognize that He is still God. St. James writes: "From whence come wars and fightings among you? Come they not hence, even of your lusts that war in your members?" (James 4: 1). War has the purpose to inflict a just punishment, to chastise His children, to punish His enemies, and to testify His resentment against sin. And God was not untouched by the pain or unmindful of the hurt that He inflicted. God is a wise father who brings His lessons home in ways that we can sense and feel. May His chastisements drive us back to Him, sure only of one thing, quiet and ready to admit it: He is God.

#### IV

#### **The Motives Prompting God to Exercise Divine Providence**

The providence of God has been compared to a mighty stream. The waters of this stream are as clear as crystal, for they come from the hills from whence cometh our help (Psalm 121). When we drink from its waters we taste and see that the Lord is good (Psalm 34: 8). Its springs are at the throne of grace, and in it we see reflected the gracious countenance of our heavenly Father.

The Scriptures state very clearly that God is prompted to exercise His providence over His creatures because He is gracious and merciful. We read Lam. 3: 22: "It is of the Lord's mercies that we are not consumed, because his compassions fail not. They are new every morning." Moses said: "Thou in thy mercy hast led forth the people thou hast redeemed" (Ex. 15: 13). Read also Psalms 106, 107, 188 and particularly Psalm 136. They prompt us to exclaim: His mercy endureth forever.

We usually act as if God owed it to man to preserve and govern him. We accept His benefits as if we were entitled to them. Do we, for instance, when we say grace, remind ourselves that our food is a gracious gift of God? When we arise in the morning, we thank God for the protection we have enjoyed during the night, but are we fully conscious of the fact that it is due alone to God's goodness that we are able to see the light of a new day? We say our evening prayer at the close of the day, but are we appreciative as we should be of the manifold blessings we have enjoyed during the day? We pray that God may preserve our Church in the pure doctrine of His saving Word, but how little do we appreciate it that our Church possesses purity of doctrine. Often we resist, with all our might, God's gracious guidance; often we blame Him for the shame and sorrow we bring upon ourselves by our own thoughtlessness or folly.

The second reason why God exercises His providence is that He sees the helplessness and needs of His creatures. For if God did not care for them, if He did not preserve them and strengthen them they would not reach the goals for which He has created them. If God did not uphold them they would cease to exist, as it is stated in the 104th Psalm: "Thou hidest thy face, they are troubled; thou takest away their breath, they die, and return to their dust." If God did not supply man with the strength he needs, he could do nothing. If God did not govern, chaos would result.

Why are we so blind and ungrateful? We should say with Jacob: I am not worthy of the least of all the mercies and of all the truth which Thou hast shewed unto Thy servant. If we did this then no matter what transpired we would not remain in the gloom of sorrow, but we would step out into the gracious sunlight of God's promises, gaze upward to the throne of grace into the loving face of our heavenly Father, and delight ourselves with His loving-kindness. We would notice so many blessings that our hearts would leap for joy, our mouths would be filled with laughter, and we would never cease extolling the love and mercy of our God.

## V

### **The Purposes or Goals of Divine Providence**

The ultimate goals of divine providence are: a) the temporal and spiritual welfare of man, particularly of the Christian, b) the glorification of God.

This final thesis follows on naturally and logically from what we have already learned about God's providence. God, namely, preserves and governs the world for man's benefit. At the creation of man God said: "Have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing ... I have given you every herb bearing seed ... and every tree, in the which is the fruit of a tree yielding seed" (Gen. 1: 26-29). After the Flood God declared: "While the earth remaineth, seedtime and harvest, and cold and heat, and summer and winter, and day and night shall not cease ... Every moving thing that liveth shall be meat for you; even as the herb have I given you all things" (Gen. 8: 22 and 9: 3). These and similar texts repeat the truth that the earth with all its resources is to be used by man. The world is for man. However, God rules the world not merely for man's temporal benefit, but chiefly for His spiritual benefit. God's guiding has one goal - to prepare him for eternal life. Man is born so that he may be reborn through Baptism and be saved. Therefore the chief goal of divine providence is our eternal salvation. If this aim is not achieved then the life of a man, no matter how successful it may be in the eyes of the world, has been an abject failure. Be it also noted that his condemnation is then his own fault, for "God would have all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth."

After bringing man to faith in Christ Jesus, divine providence continues its work by preserving him in that faith unto the end. This is clearly taught in many places of the Holy Scriptures. Rom. 8: 28: "All things must work together for good to them that love God," etc. Hebr. 12: 6ff and 11; Rom. 5: 1-5; Jer. 29: 11.

All earthly occurrences, all blessings must contribute to man's salvation. The good things of life should be a constant reminder that God is truly mindful of our welfare and should arouse our heartfelt gratitude. Even when God takes us into the divine school of tribulation, the crosses He sends are to contribute to our salvation. In this school the new man receives his training (James 5: 10,11). If God's will is to be done then He must break ours. If we are to learn to trust in Him, we must first learn how ineffective all earthly help is. The crosses which God sends may be heavy and painful, but they will draw us away from the world and draw us nearer to Him, and thus prove salutary. Prof. Bente says: "It means that God has special use for the Christians, sees in them special values, and that He goes to great lengths and takes unusual pains with them to present them to Himself without blemish or spot." Let us never doubt that our lives are controlled by God's providence. There is no blind chance. Blessed is he who can say even in the darkest hour: Beloved it is well, God's ways are always right. And perfect love is o'er them all, Though far above our sight. Beloved, it is well. The path that Jesus trod, Though rough and strait and dark it be, Leads home to heaven and God. The late Dr. Maier spoke eloquently on this theme: "In our short-sighted vision we cannot understand God's purposes and discern the love that chastens us, but Jesus tells us, 'What I do thou knowest not now, but thou shalt know hereafter.' Some day in the radiance of that higher, fuller, better knowledge we shall receive the answer to the repeated whys. We shall discover divine healing in every hurt, spiritual remedy in each reverse; that, if we suffer with Christ on earth, we shall reign with Him in heaven. Wait patiently for the Lord. Wait joyfully even amid heartbreaking sorrows. His deliverance is sure. No sorrow can overshadow you which will not end in God's right time and in His good way. Remember, the purest gold is that which has been refined in the hottest flame. The diamond must be cut and ground and polished to sparkle in its fiery radiance. By trials and tribulations God seeks to cleanse and prepare the Christian and keep him in his faith."

However, there is one goal which goes even beyond the final salvation of the elect. This is the ultimate, the chief purpose, and it is the glory and honour of God. Thus we read, Eph. 1: 11,12: "In whom also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestinated according to the purpose of him who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will: that we should be to the praise of his glory." All His wonderful works are to make men say among the nations: The Lord reigneth (1 Chron. 16: 31). Yes, to Him be glory forever (Rom. 11: 36).

## Conclusion

Let us also join with this doxology. We too have seen how marvellous beyond words divine providence is. It is like a precious gem, each facet shining with a dazzling radiance. When we see how numerous are the objects over which it extends we exclaim with the Psalmist: "How precious also are thy thoughts unto me, O God! How great is the sum of them! If I should count them, they are more in number than the sand" (Psalm 139: 17). We see another facet which shows us that God upholds each being on earth. We confess: "Such knowledge is too wonderful for me: it is high, I cannot attain unto it" (Psalm 139: 6ff). We look at another facet and see how well God directs all things, and we are led to exclaim with the Psalmist: "O Lord, how manifold are thy works! In wisdom hast thou made them all" (Psalm 104: 24). If we gaze deeply into its depths in order to learn the purposes of God's providence we must confess: "Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable are his judgements, and his ways past finding out!" And finally, when we step into the Holy of Holies of God's providence in order to learn the motive of it all, we are then met by the lovely person of our Redeemer, and as we gaze at His wounds words fail us, we can only fall down before Him and adore: "My Lord and my God."

May the study of this sublime doctrine help us all in our Christian lives. May it help us to face the future without fear or trembling. We are living in the days of which the Saviour foretold: "Men's hearts failing them for fear, and for looking after those things which are coming on the earth; for the powers of heaven shall be shaken." Sinister forces threaten the very existence of Christ's Church. However, believing in

God's providence, we can turn our faces upward to our heavenly Father and trustingly say: I know not what the future holds of marvel or surprise, Assured of this alone that life and death His mercy underlies. I know not where His islands lift Their fronded palms in air: I only know I cannot drift Beyond His love and care. And should you suffer loss or bereavement, should illness or poverty be your lot, then trust implicitly in the providence of God, do not despair, but firmly believe that God has sent it or allowed it to come upon you not to harm you, but for your good. The great and mighty God who sustains and governs all things will direct your misfortunes and hardships so that they will help you to sail safely into the safe haven of Paradise.

O may this doctrine not only engender an unfaltering trust in God, may it also move us to gratitude and praise. We shall conclude with the doxology of the Psalmist: "Praise ye the Lord. Praise God in his sanctuary: praise him in the firmament of his power. Praise him for his mighty acts; praise him according to his excellent greatness ... Let everything that hath breath praise the Lord. Praise ye the Lord" (Psalm 150).