

DOCTRINE FOR THE YOUNG

THE DIVINE PROVIDENCE

by the Rev. Douglas Taylor

How is the Lord involved in our world? How does He, in fact, govern it? How does He *provide* what is needed?

These are most important questions for us to consider. After all, how can we cooperate with the Lord unless we know how He operates, how He works?

The way the Lord rules and provides—His Providence—is usually called the Divine Providence, isn't it? The Divine Providence means the rule or government of the Divine love and wisdom. Just as the Lord, when He *created* the universe acted from His Divine love by means of His Divine wisdom, so He maintains His creation in a state of order from His Divine love by means of Divine wisdom. What His Divine love intends to do, His Divine wisdom provides the means of doing. The Lord *provides* what is needed to keep all that He has created in order, and what is needed to restore order when *disorder* appears on the scene.

Now, have you ever thought of this? We human beings are the only cause of disorder. We are the only ones of the Lord's creatures who can get out of order. All the lower orders of the Creator's creatures are permanently in the order of their life, the order or pattern into which they were created. All plants and animals, for example, live and act according to the order or pattern of their genre and species. We human beings *alone* are free to depart from the order of life intended for us.

And what is the order of life intended for us human beings? It is that we should love the Lord first and our neighbor as ourselves. The two great commandments show us how to be truly human. But, unlike the plants and animals, we can get out of that order and bring in *disorder*—as we know all too well! For this reason the Lord has to work to provide what is needed to keep us in order, and to restore us to order when we depart from it. So it is that the Divine Providence is directed *above all* to the human race, and to other things for the sake of the human race. In fact, the whole end or goal that the Lord has in view is a heaven made up from the human race. The Lord has this in mind in everything that He does.

We can understand this better if only we consider what we mean when we say that the Lord is love itself and wisdom itself. There are three characteristics of the Divine love: that it wills that there be others outside of itself, who have nothing of Divinity or Infinity; that it strives to work in conjunction with those others outside of itself and not be at odds with them; and, finally, it wills to make them *eternally* happy. The Divine love is not content to make others happy temporarily or for a short time; it can be satisfied only when people are *eternally* happy or blessed.

On the other hand the Divine wisdom—or way of operating—supplies the *means* of there being others outside of the Divine who have no Divinity or Infinity; it provides the means of being conjoined with those others, and the means of making them eternally happy. The Divine wisdom, then, is the way the Divine love works, the way it operates.

On the physical plane we can easily see hundreds of examples of the Divine love operating by means of its wisdom. The various ways the Lord's love works in nature are usually called the *laws* of nature, but they are really the Lord's laws on the plane of nature.

But what is a law? Is it not a description of the way something works? Isn't the law of gravity, for example, a description of what happens when objects fall? And isn't it the same with all the laws of physics? They are descriptions of the way things work.

But what seems to be a new idea to many people is this: that on the spiritual plane also, the Lord operates according to certain ways or laws. They are not mere rules; they are laws that are predictable and reliable. There are, in fact, *laws* of the Divine Providence—the Lord's love operating according to certain laws always. He has now *described* them for us in the Writings, so that we can cooperate intelligently with Him. These laws had to be revealed because apparently there are still many people who have the idea that the Lord's Providence is a changeable, thing; that He can be swayed from His path if we storm and besiege heaven with our much-speaking; that the Lord is angry with it is the same with misfortunes that happen to us in this life; they can be either blessings or curses. It all depends, not on the experiences themselves, but on our attitude to them. If we look at disappointments, frustrating situations, failure (even seemingly endless failures), if we look at them from a merely natural viewpoint, from the point of view of this world only, then, of course, they can only seem to be curses. But if we have the right attitude to them and think of them as means to our salvation from selfishness and worldliness, as *opportunities* to look to the Lord the Eternal One, as ways and means by which the Lord can prepare us for heaven, then these things can be turned into blessings, and some *eternal* good can be brought forth out of them.

But just what this eternal good is in *particular* can be known only by the Lord. “My thoughts are not your thoughts—neither are your ways My ways says the Lord”. We are not permitted to know the details of the Lord's ways, His footsteps, so to speak, because then we would without doubt rebel against them, and in this way pervert the workings of Providence. Besides, we would lose what the Lord never permits us to lose: our freedom, and a feeling of self-determination.

Yet we can see something of the workings of Providence, *after* the events have passed, by hindsight—if we look for them. You remember that Moses was not allowed to look upon the Lord face-to-face, but was only allowed to look at the back of the Lord. This illustrates another of the laws of Divine Providence—that we may see Providence only in the past, never in the present. We can all recall experiences and actions of ours that we wish had never happened, but our later regret and actual repentance, the change of our life, these are of the Divine Providence. They are the spiritual and eternal good that have come out of them. At the time we could see nothing of this, for as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are the Lord's ways higher than our ways, and His thoughts higher than our thoughts.