

## Providence – 14 (Draft) Theses

### ***Providence and Knowledge of God***

1. Our thinking about providence is informed by our thinking about God.
  - If our God is like a clock-maker who created the world and then left it to develop according to its inner dynamic/mechanics, God's self uninvolved in creation, we will not countenance a theory of providence at all.
  - If our God is altogether immanent in the cosmos, identical with its unfolding process/history (as nature, Gaia, spirit), our understanding of providence will be indistinguishable from fate or chance.
2. A Christian account of providence is derived from Christian teaching about God.
  - Providence is knowledge of God, and known as God is known, in the act of faith, which is the work of the Holy Spirit.

### ***Providence, Revelation, and Faith***

3. Christian teaching about God is derived from God's self-revelation in the history of Israel with its consummation in Jesus Christ.
  - Faith in providence is derived from 'revelation', that is, from those acts in which God makes himself present to disordered creatures in such a way that they are caused to know that against which they have blinded themselves.
4. That self-revelatory history is authoritatively set forth in the prophetic and apostolic witness of Holy Scripture.
  - The task of a Christian theology of providence can be undertaken only by drawing upon the resources given to it by the gospel; it can only hear the prophets and apostles, and only speak after such hearing – otherwise it has nothing to say.

### ***Providence, Creation, and Purpose***

5. According to that witness, God of his own power, wisdom, and love created that which is not God – the world, the cosmos.
6. By that same power, wisdom, and love, God provides for and sustains his creation.
  - God does not simply provide the initial motion of nature, setting its inclination then allowing it to take its course; he is not a mere observer of creaturely time, but an agent.
7. God's gracious provision is not static, but ordered by and to his eternal purpose for his creation.
8. God's purpose for his creation is that it should be brought to perfection, fulfilment, consummation in perfect fellowship with himself.
  - God's administration of his creation (his providential activity) is the execution of his 'plan for the fulness of time' (Eph 1.10).
  - To speak of God's plan is to indicate God's determination to bless creatures.
  - By divine determination, creatures are 'destined and appointed to *live*' (Eph 1.12) ... praising the creator's glory.
  - That providence, in the strict sense of the divine plan, is not bleak destiny is above all decided in the fact that it is in *him*, in Christ – the one who is both the origin (Eph 1.4) and the goal (Eph 1.10) of what God's love establishes for creatures.
9. The Father's purpose for his creation is not merely external; rather, creation is integrally ordered towards its fulfilment.
  - For the Christian confession, created being is not indeterminate but has a nature ordered towards relation to God.
  - Creation is both presupposed by and reaches out towards the history of grace, because that is the kind of creation to which God gives being, a creation which may enjoy relation to him.

### ***Providence and Evil***

10. 'Evil' names all that, inexplicably but with terrible force, threatens to frustrate God's good purpose for his creation and so to bring it to naught.
11. But God outbids any and all evil (cf., Rom 8.35-9).
  - Providence is a permanently contrary doctrine. It defines the theological grounds for hope in face of the evident horrors in the world – against hope, in hope, believing (cf., Rom 4.18).

### ***Providence and the Trinity***

12. The providential, purposive activity of God with respect to creation is traditionally described in trinitarian terms:
  - the Father's loving purpose for his creation;
  - the Spirit's ordering of the activities of creatures towards the fulfilment of the Father's purpose;
  - the Son's redemptive intervention to draw creation back from ruin so that it may attain its end.
13. The Holy Spirit of God inspires and informs the activity of creatures in conformity with their God-given integrity – moving them to move towards the fulfilment of the Father's purpose for them.
14. The mission of the Son, from eternity, in the history of Israel, and above all in the incarnation, rescues and redeems creation from its ruinous course, setting it free to live in accord with its God-given integrity, and summoning it to live towards its promised end in perfect fellowship with God.

Patrick Patterson  
June, 2021

Note: Small print items are quotations from: John Webster, *God Without Measure...* vol. I, Chap. 9 "On the Theology of Providence" (Bloomsbury: 2016), 127-41.