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Ein Prediger muss nicht allein *weiden*, also dass er die Schafe unterweise, wie sie rechte Christen sollen sein, sondern auch daneben den Wölfen *wehren*, dass sie die Schafe nicht angreifen und mit falscher Lehre verfuehren und Irrtum einfuehren.

Luther

Es ist kein Ding, das die Leute mehr bei der Kirche behaelt denn die gute Predigt. — *Apologie, Art. 24*

If the trumpet give an uncertain sound, who shall prepare himself to the battle? — *1 Cor. 14:8*

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# God's Direction in Our Lives and the Element of Chance

By E. W. HINRICHS

(A Conference Essay)

## INTRODUCTION: DIVINE PROVIDENCE

The topic "God's Direction in Our Lives and the Element of Chance," theologically considered, belongs to the field of dogmatics, more particularly to the section treating of divine providence.

In order to set the stage for an acceptable presentation of the Scriptural teaching relative to the topic, let us briefly consider some of the basic truths concerning divine providence.

Dr. J. T. Mueller offers the following definition in his *Dogmatics*: "Divine providence is the eternal act of the entire Trinity, whereby God (a) most efficaciously upholds the things created, both as an entirety and singly, both in species and individuals; (b) concurs in their actions and effects; and (c) freely and wisely governs all things to His own glory and the welfare and safety of the universe, especially of the godly."

This providence of God is evident: 1. In His gracious preservation of the works of creation. "O Lord, Thou preservest man and beast" (Ps. 36:6). We term this His *preserving providence*. 2. In His gracious concurrence with all that happens. "In Him we live and move and have our being" (Acts 17:28). This is known as His *concurring providence*. 3. In His gracious government of the whole universe. "None can stay His hand, or say unto Him, What doest Thou?" (Dan. 4:35.) "For Thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever and ever" (Matt. 6:13). This is God's *governing providence*.

Accordingly, the Creator is not a "factory god," who completed his product and then turned it over to another or entrusted it to some impersonal, blind mechanical force. He is no absentee landlord, or a mere spectator of the universe He brought forth. "By Him all things consist" (Col. 1:17). They also perform all their functions through Him. "He maketh His sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust" (Matt. 5:45.)

"He left not Himself without witness, in that He did good, and gave us rain from heaven, and fruitful seasons, filling our hearts with food and gladness" (Acts 14:17). Cp. Ps. 104:10-30.

It must be noted that divine providence is not merely a general supervision of the universe as such. It extends to all creatures individually.

It directs and controls all the *forces of nature*. "He appointed the moon for seasons: the sun knoweth his going down. Thou makest darkness, and it is night" (Ps. 104:19-20). "Tomorrow about this time I will cause it to rain a very grievous hail" (Ex. 9:18). "I will send rain upon the earth" (1 Kings 18:1). I am He "which shaketh the earth out of her place, and the pillars thereof tremble" (Job 9:6). "He toucheth the hills, and they smoke" (Ps. 104:32). "He made a decree for the rain, and a way for the lightning of the thunder" (Job 28:26). "With clouds He covereth the light and commandeth it not to shine" (Job 36:32). "He saith to the snow, Be thou on the earth. . . . By the breath of God frost is given, and the breadth of the waters is straitened. . . . He causeth it to come, whether for correction, or for His land, or for mercy" (Job 37:6-13). "Thou rulest the raging of the sea" (Ps. 89:9). "I have withholden the rain from you, when there were yet three months from the harvest; and I caused it to rain upon one city and not upon another" (Amos 4:7).

It sustains *plants and trees*. "Consider the lilies. . . . If God so clothe the grass of the field" (Matt. 6:28 ff.). "He causeth grass to grow for the cattle, and herb for the service of man" (Ps. 104:14). "The cedars of Lebanon, which He hath planted" (Ps. 104:16). "I have smitten you with blasting and mildew. When your gardens and your vineyards increased, the palmerworm devoured them" (Amos 4:9).

It governs and directs *birds, animals, insects*. "Behold the fowls of the air . . . your heavenly Father feedeth them" (Matt. 6:26). A sparrow "shall not fall on the ground without your Father" (Matt. 10:29). "There shall nothing cast their young, nor be barren in thy land" (Ex. 23:26). "I will send hornets before thee, which shall drive out the Hivite" (Ex. 23:28). "I will send wild beasts among you, which shall rob you of your children" (Lev. 26:22).

It also embraces *all men individually*. "And hath made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth, and hath determined the times before appointed, and the bounds of their habitation" (Acts 17:26). "The Lord looketh from heaven; He beholdeth all the sons of men. . . . He looketh forth upon all the inhabitants of the earth, He that fashioneth the hearts of them all; He that considereth all their works" (Ps. 33:13-15, R. V.).

And as the ultimate purpose of creation is the glory of God (Gen. 1:31; Prov. 16:4; Ps. 104:30-31; Rev. 4:11) and its intermediate end the benefit of man (Ps. 115:16), whom God made in His own image and for His own glory (Ps. 60:7-8), divine providence likewise has as its ultimate purpose the glory of God (Ps. 104:30-31) and as its intermediate end the benefit of man, particularly the benefit of His people, His holy Christian Church, for whose sake all things exist (Matt. 24:14), and whose welfare all must serve. "All things work together for good to them that love God" (Rom. 8:28). Even "the gates of hell shall not prevail against" the Church (Matt. 16:18).

Finally it should be stated that while Scripture views divine providence as the work of the Holy Trinity, it nevertheless ascribes with special emphasis the preservation and government of the world to our exalted Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. It is He who "upholds all things by the Word of His power" (Heb. 1:3), by whom "all things consist" (Col. 1:17), who is "above all principality and power and might and dominion . . . all things under His feet . . . the Head over all things to the Church" (Eph. 1:20 ff.). This doctrine, always a comfort to the saints, is of significance in the consideration of our topic.

With this basic truth of providence — the truth that God's omnipotence, goodness, and mercy perpetually sustain, control, and govern all creatures and all forces of nature, collectively and individually, for His glory and for the welfare and special benefit of His people, collectively and individually — with this truth as a setting, let us proceed to a study of the topic assigned to us: God's Direction in Our Lives and the Element of Chance.

The topic suggests a natural division of the subject matter into two parts: 1) God's Direction in Our Lives; and 2) the Element of Chance.

## I. GOD'S DIRECTION IN OUR LIVES

While divine providence extends to all creatures, it is concerned especially with man, the image of his Maker and, in his fallen state, the object of His redeeming and sanctifying love.

God determines his *birth*. "The children which God hath graciously given thy servant" (Gen. 33:5), Jacob confessed. "And Joseph said unto his father, They are my sons, whom God hath given me in this place" (Gen. 48:9). "I (the Lord) multiplied his (Abraham's) seed and gave him Isaac. And I gave unto Isaac, Jacob and Esau" (Josh. 24:3-4). "Wherefore, then, hast Thou brought me forth out of the womb?" asks Job. "Thou art He that took me out of my mother's bowels," says the Psalmist (71:6). And the Lord Himself instructs Jeremiah, "Before I formed thee in the belly, I knew thee; and before thou camest forth out of the womb, I sanctified thee, and I ordained thee a prophet unto the nations" (Jer. 1:5).

Before ever a crib had been prepared for our coming, before a single stitch of our layette had been sewed, before an expectant mother ever thought of our name, before ever the worlds were framed, even from everlasting God knew and ordained our course.

God directs men's *hearts and thoughts*, their willing and doing, their words and works. "He fashioneth the hearts of them all" (Ps. 33:15, R. V.), *i. e.*, "He is the Former of their hearts all at once, both in the creation of each soul and in forming the thoughts of the heart under His providence" (P. E. Kretzmann *ad loc.*). "Pious hearts God creates and rules; wicked hearts He directs and prevents, so that not their will, but His will is done" (Luther *ad loc.*). Human experience acknowledges this truth in the proverbial dictum, "Der Mensch denkt, aber Gott lenkt." Indeed, God "searches the reins and hearts" (Rev. 2:23). "O Lord, Thou hast searched me and known me, Thou knowest my downsitting and mine uprising, thou understandest my thought afar off. Thou compassed my path and my lying down, and art acquainted with all my ways. For there is not a word in my tongue, but lo, O Lord, Thou knowest it altogether. Thou hast beset me behind and before, and laid Thine hand upon me" (Ps. 139:1-5). He endows each with certain talents and abilities for

some specific work and at the proper time opens to him the door of opportunity. "The way of man is not in himself: it is not in man that walketh to direct his steps" (Jer. 10:23). "Man's goings are of the Lord; how can a man then understand his own way? (Prov. 20:24.) Truly, He is the Unseen Guest at every meal, the Silent Listener to every deal, and at night when we "steep our tired eyelids in sleep" He stands guard. For the Keeper of Israel "shall neither slumber nor sleep" (Ps. 121:4). Nothing in the lives of His people is too trivial for His providential care. Not a farthing worth (about ½ cent worth) of sparrow (something that merely involves the relationship of Creator to creature) is sold in the market without His providence. Surely they, to whom He is "your Father," may place the most trivial of their tasks and problems into His merciful hand. "The very hairs of your head are all numbered" (Matt. 10:29-30).

It is also God who brings *husband and wife* together. "What God hath joined together" (Matt. 19:6). "A prudent wife is from the Lord" (Prov. 19:14). It is He that blesses the marriage with children — "an heritage of the Lord" (Ps. 127:3). He is "a father of the fatherless, and a judge of the widows. . . . God setteth the solitary in families" (Ps. 68:5-6).

The distribution of *earthly wealth* is also within the realm of providence. It is God who enriches and in His own good time reduces to poverty. "The Lord maketh poor and maketh rich" (1 Sam. 2:7). "For promotion cometh neither from the east, nor from the west, nor from the south, but God putteth down one and setteth up another" (Ps. 75:6-7). "Remember the Lord thy God, for it is He that giveth thee power to get wealth, that He may establish His covenant" (Deut. 8:18), that covenant in which His people should be blessed and His name be glorified. Also the Virgin Mary, her soul magnifying the Lord and rejoicing in God her Savior at the anticipated birth of the Christ, sang, "He hath put down the mighty from their seats, and exalted them of low degree. He hath filled the hungry with good things, and the rich He hath sent empty away" (Luke 1:52-53).

Providence ordains governments (Rom. 13:1 ff.), decrees the boundaries of nations (Acts 17:26), and decides where each individual shall live. He builds and plants kingdoms and nations. He makes "princes in all the earth" (Ps. 45:16).

He plucks up, pulls down, and destroys them. "He bringeth the princes to nothing" (Is. 40:23). "He leadeth princes away spoiled and overthroweth the mighty" (Job 12:19). Mighty Pharaoh challenges, "Who is the Lord that I should obey His voice?" Yet the Lord delivers Israel out of his hand and makes it a mighty people. The pagan Turk must oppose Romish imperialism so that the kingdom may thrive in the Lutheran Reformation. The Catholic French are decisively defeated in what to the leaders of thought in Europe must have appeared a not extremely important colonial war (French and Indian), to spare a new nation just being born the shackles of Romish culture and society, and to make possible the founding of our nation with its civil and religious liberties—an asylum for persecuted peoples of the Lord and a place for the upbuilding of His Kingdom of Grace. French infidelity at the turn of the 19th century is visited by the dreadful Revolution, and its brutal excesses are followed by the regime of the iron hand of Napoleon. His military and political intrigues force Spain secretly to cede the vast Louisiana Territory to France in 1800, but the exigencies of war interfered with his ambitions in the new world and made necessary the sale of that territory to the United States in 1803, providing a haven of refuge for our Saxon fathers and others. Napoleon's hot pride in turn is frostbitten in Russia's cruel snows and left to wilt and die.

And in the history of the nations as it is being unfolded in our generation—what a welter of elements, what cross-currents and undercurrents of pagan and idolatrous isms, what a conflict between ideologies, what military machines and weapons! It's simply gigantic! Yet in this little judgment day of our God, in which He has manifestly rebuked the perverse and ungodly, globally summoned the nations to repentance, and disciplined His very own by the millions, lest they perish with the world—in all this we implicitly trust that the providence of Him who is the omnipotent Head over all things, for the Church and the individual saint, is bringing to pass the plans of His wisdom for the heirs of salvation, using His enemies as His footstool, while creating opportunities for the spread of His Kingdom of Grace and ever leading it onward and upward to glory.

The very sinister designs of evil men against the in-

dividual saints, God overrules for good. The object of his brothers' envy, Joseph is heartlessly sold to foreigners into slavery, becomes the target of a woman's lust, and for his uprightness and chastity the victim of her hate, lands in prison, only to become the premier of Egypt and the source of livelihood for Israel and his people. "Ye thought evil against me, but God meant it unto good, to bring to pass as it is this day, to save much people alive" (Gen. 50:20). Even more than that; he became the instrument through which his wicked and wayward brothers came to repentance and reinstatement in spiritual Israel — indeed "to save much people alive."

*Troubles* and *diseases* with which the saints are afflicted also come to pass under God's providence. "Man," also the believer, "is born unto trouble, as the sparks fly upward" (Job 5:7). Yet "I know, O Lord, that Thy judgments are right, and that Thou in faithfulness hast afflicted me" (Ps. 119:75). "Whom the Lord loveth He correcteth" (Prov. 3:12). "Lord, in trouble have they visited Thee" (Is. 26:16). "Behold, I have refined thee, but not with silver; I have chosen thee in the furnace of affliction. For Mine own sake, for Mine own sake will I do it" (Is. 48:10-11). Indeed, the wicked flourish while the righteous are cast down. Yet "this also cometh forth from the Lord of Hosts, which is wonderful in counsel and excellent in working" (Is. 28:29). Concerning a man born blind, Jesus assured, "Neither hath this man sinned nor his parents: but that the works of God should be made manifest in him" (John 9:3). Here, too, "the Lord reigneth, He is clothed with majesty" (Ps. 93:1).

Whether afflictions are a chastisement of the heavenly Father, working humble submission to the Savior's will, or a discipline for further uses in the Kingdom of Grace (*e.g.*, Moses, Luther), or a design in which the work of God should be manifest, or a combination of all these purposes, may not always be evident to the child of God. An Israelite maiden is sold into the slavery of Naaman's household, and through her the Syrian general comes to the knowledge of Jehovah. She may not have understood God's purposes with her, but she did trust His providence. C. F. W. Walther by some strange circumstance is prevented from taking passage on the ill-fated *Amalia* and sails fifteen days earlier on the *Johann Georg* under another young man's name. At the time



he must have little surmised Heaven's control of the circumstances. An only son of aged parents is removed by death, or a little child is deprived of the one parent that stands between it and orphanhood. "How unsearchable are His judgments and His ways past finding out!" (Rom. 11:33). Men have explored limited areas of the ocean's bottom, but in the sea of divine providence there are depths which cherubim and seraphim must shun. "Who hath known the mind of the Lord? or who hath been His counselor?" (Rom. 11:34.) "What I do thou knowest not now, but thou shalt know hereafter" (John 13:7). "It doth not yet appear what we shall be" (1 John 3:2). "Now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known" (1 Cor. 13:12). "For we shall see Him as He is" (1 John 3:2).

My life is but a weaving  
 Between my Lord and me;  
 I cannot choose the colors  
 Nor all the pattern see.  
 Sometimes He chooseth sorrow,  
 And I, with foolish pride,  
 Forget God sees the upper,  
 And I the under side.

Not till the loom is silent  
 And the shuttles cease to fly,  
 Will He reveal the pattern  
 Or tell the reason why.  
 The dark threads are as needful  
 In the Weaver's skillful hand  
 As the threads of gold and silver  
 In the pattern He has planned.

While the Christian often cannot fathom God's purposes with him, he is ever implicitly confident that God who "spared not His own Son but delivered Him up for us all," must also freely bless him "in all things." "All things" must "work together for good to them that love God" (Rom. 8:28, 32).

Divine providence also decrees *the terminus of life*. "The Lord killeth, and maketh alive; He bringeth down to the grave, and bringeth up" (1 Sam. 2:6). Abigail says to David, "The soul of my lord shall be bound in the bundle of life with the Lord thy God; and the souls of thine enemies, them shall he sling out, as out of the middle of a sling" (1 Sam. 25:29). Job says of his deceased children, "The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away" (Job 1:21). "In the Lord's hand is the soul of every living thing and the breath of all mankind" (Job 12:10). "Thou turnest man to destruction" (Ps. 90:3). "Thou takest away their breath, they die and return to their dust" (Ps. 104:29). "Is there not an appointed time to man upon earth?" (Job 7:1.) "It is appointed unto men once to die" (Heb. 9:27). "Man's days are

determined, the number of his months are with Thee; Thou hast appointed his bounds that he cannot pass" (Job 14:5). "He is thy life and the length of thy days" (Deut. 30:20). "My times are in Thy hand" (Ps. 31:15).

## II. THE ELEMENT OF CHANCE

Since all created things and their functions are wholly subject to God's sovereign providence, all serving the glory of the Holy Trinity and His designs toward men, especially the saints, there is, then, strictly speaking, no such thing in our lives as an element of chance. While the phrase may pass as an inexact term by which men express that which happens without or contrary to their designs, or that which comes to pass as a result of the risks they take, the *Deo volente* of our fathers is more in accord with Christian truth and thought.

The factor of man's willing, planning, risking, doing, however, leads to the Biblical teaching of the relationship of God's providence to the use of other causes and means by which He preserves, upholds, and governs creation. This functioning of divine providence through means, regardless of the good or evil use made of them by the creature, is by our theologians termed divine concurrence. In this sphere of divine sovereignty both "God and the means work," but the means are always subordinate to providence and function "only as long as God works through them." "Except the Lord build the house, they labor in vain that build it; except the Lord keep the city, the watchman waketh but in vain" (Ps. 127:1).

This concurrence is not antecedent, but simultaneous. "It occurs when the action itself is produced" (Mueller). Thus food nourishes, drink refreshes, medicine heals, government protects, etc., because of the concurring operation of God in the use of the means. Accordingly, the laws of nature are simply the will of the Creator exerted in the being and action of His creatures, in order that they may be preserved and sustained in their being and doing. Likewise the means of grace, the Word of God and the Sacraments, beget new life, regenerate, quicken and sustain spiritual life for the renewal of the divine image in sinful man and for his eternal salvation because the Spirit of God works through these means.

This truth of Holy Scripture and its significance to the

Christian's philosophy of life and his use of divinely appointed means is widely assailed by deism and naturalism, manifesting itself in the principles of lodgery and of the idealistic and unitarian cults of today, many of which seek to identify their basic views with the ideals of democracy. These philosophies reject divine revelation, dethrone Providence, write "immutable law" with capital letters, and identify Deity with the "Laws of Nature." Pantheism, too, rejects the personality and transcendence of God as well as His Scriptural revelation, identifies Deity with the material universe, and denounces this Christian truth concerning Providence. Hence the pantheistic and other anti-Scriptural philosophies of our modern world, basic to evolutionism in the natural sphere, to materialism in present-day social and economic thinking, and to atheistic communism in political structures, have no place in their systems for a Providence which sovereignly overrules all, yet concurs in the laws and forces of nature for the preservation and government of the created universe.

The Bible's doctrine of divine concurrence is of especial importance in a study of the relation of divine Providence to evil and its forces.

According to Scripture, evil originated through the will of Satan, who wholly depraved the nature and will of man with sin, or caused him to have a wicked heart out of which proceed only evil thoughts and deeds (Matt. 15:19). It did not originate with God. God is holy, and "in Him is no sin" (1 John 3:5). In His perfect holiness He is unalterably opposed to every evil work and absolutely forbids and condemns it in His Law. "Ye shall be holy, for I, the Lord, your God, am holy" (Lev. 19:2). At times He prevents evil acts from happening, as when He says to Abimelech, "I also withheld thee from sinning against Me" (Gen. 20:6). And whenever He permits evil acts to occur, He so controls them that they must serve His wise and holy purposes. "Ye thought evil against me, but God meant it unto good" (Gen. 50:20). "All things work together for good to them that love God" (Rom. 8:28).

Nevertheless, since divine Providence governs and overrules everything in the universe, collectively and individually, even fashioning all the hearts of men, how is it possible

for God to concur in the evil actions of the creature without being responsible? To say that these acts are done without God is a denial of Providence. That is atheism. To say that they are acts for which God is responsible is a denial of God's holiness and goodness. This is done in pantheism. Scripture teaches that while God "concurrs in evil acts," He does so "only in so far as they are acts, not in so far as they are evil" (Mueller). Let us illustrate. God is, so to speak, the power behind the dynamo. Electricity drives the trackless trolley, but whether it crashes into a telephone pole or remains in its path depends upon the driver, not upon the driving force. If it runs over a man and kills him while the driver is in careless conversation with a passenger, the engineer in the power station is not responsible. God gives the thief cunning and power to steal. He gives the killer strength to press the trigger. He gives the sinner power to sin: yet He in no way becomes a partaker of the transgression. The thief, the murderer, and the sinner could invest that strength and ability for some constructive purpose. It is not Providence, but the morally responsible creature that misuses that power and commits the sin. Certainly "men live and move and have their being" in God, and receive "life and breath and all things" from Him (Acts 17:25-28), not only when they do good, but also when they do evil. Yet "the Lord is upright" (Deut. 32:4). There "is no unrighteousness in Him" (Ps. 92:15 f.). He "is a God of truth and without iniquity, just and right is He" (Deut. 32:4).

God's concurrence in the evil actions of His creatures is sometimes termed His *permissive providence*. It is Scriptural to say, "God permits evil." "My people would not hearken to My voice . . . so I gave them up unto their own hearts' lust: they walked in their own counsels" (Ps. 81:11-12). God "in times past suffered the nations to walk in their own ways" (Acts 14:16). "God gave them over to a reprobate mind" (Rom. 1:28).

God's permissive providence, however, must not be viewed as a kind, grandfatherly indulgence that remains unoffended by men's sin, or that under certain circumstances suspends the Law and gives license to sin. Neither does it imply a weakness in God, as though He were ignorant of men's transgression or lacked the power to prevent it. Under His providence it may at times even be a most righteous judgment,

punishing sin with sin. Because the Gentiles, "when they knew God, glorified Him not as God," but "changed the glory of the uncorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible man" and "changed the truth of God into a lie," "God also gave them up to uncleanness through the lusts of their own hearts" and "gave them up unto vile affections" and "over to a reprobate mind" (Rom. 1:21-32). Yet even in such instances it must be remembered that God neither wills the evil nor has pleasure in the sin by which it is punished. Just in connection with the previous passage Paul asserts: "The wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold the truth in unrighteousness" (Rom. 1:18). "Thou art not a God that taketh pleasure in wickedness" (Ps. 5:4).

It should also be stated in this connection that divine Providence concurs in the morally good works of men. It is God who works the civil righteousness in the unregenerate of society through government and law, and He rewards it with temporal, mundane blessing. "For rulers are not a terror to good works, but to the evil. . . . Do that which is good, and thou shalt have praise of the same. For he is the minister of God to thee for good" (Rom. 13:3-4). The spiritual righteousness of the saints God works through the gracious operation of the Holy Ghost in the means of grace, and bestows not merely the power to do good, but also effects the good act itself. "It is God that worketh in you both to will and to do of His good pleasure" (Phil. 2:13).

Since God in His sovereign power and mercy deals with men through means, both with regard to the preservation and direction of their physical being and life, that is, through food, drink, clothing, shoes, house, home, wife, children, etc., and with regard to their spiritual election, conversion, regeneration, and sanctification, that is, through Word and Sacrament: it is important for our consideration to note the relationship of His providence to the uses which men make of the divinely prescribed means. For even though "men live and move and have their being" in God, yet God views them as free, self-determining beings, who are morally responsible to Him for whatever they do. From the *fiat* of the holy Creator they were issued in His own image of knowledge, righteousness, and true holiness (Col. 3:10; Eph. 4:24). He endowed them with intellect and will, free to know

and to choose and to have dominion over the creatures and forces of the earth—all in accord with the will of their Maker and subject to the norm of His holiness, morally responsible to Him. (Gen. 1:28; 2:15-17.) And even their fall into sin and their subsequent enslavement to evil—their own doing and their own undoing—in no way nullifies this responsibility any more than it nullifies the Law itself. They are still morally accountable to their Maker. For the Gentiles, “which know not the Law,” *i. e.*, the revealed Law, nevertheless “show the works of the Law written in their hearts” (Rom. 2:14-15), and “know the judgment of God, that they which commit such things are worthy of death” (Rom. 1:32).

Holy Scripture speaks of the doings of men in this connection from two different viewpoints:

1. From the viewpoint of divine Providence all things must happen just as they do happen;

2. But from the viewpoint of man's responsibility they could happen otherwise.

A striking illustration of this truth is afforded us in the betrayal, condemnation, and crucifixion of our Lord. From the viewpoint of Providence all this had to happen just as it did, since God in His gracious plan for the redemption of man had from eternity foreknown and determined all this to happen. “Him (Jesus of Nazareth), being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God” (Acts 2:23). “Against Thy holy child Jesus . . . both Herod and Pontius Pilate, and the Gentiles and the people of Israel were gathered together, for to do whatever Thy hand and Thy counsel determined before to be done” (Acts 4:27-28). Yet neither Judas nor Herod nor Pilate was forced by Providence to commit the crimes by which the Christ was delivered into death. “Truly the Son of Man goeth as it was determined, but woe unto that man *by whom* He is betrayed” (Luke 22:22). “And from henceforth Pilate sought to release Him, but the Jews cried out,” etc. (John 19:12). “Jesus of Nazareth . . . approved of God among you by miracles and wonders and signs, which God did by Him in your midst, as ye yourselves know, Him, being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, *ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain*” (Acts 2:22-23). From these texts it is evident that from the viewpoint of human responsibility Judas, Pilate, and the Jews committed their

crimes on their own responsibility, and that against better knowledge. Yet everything happened according to "the determinate counsel of God."

Since God in His providence binds man, both in the realm of nature and of grace, to the use of means appointed for his welfare, the events in his life could happen otherwise, sequent upon the moral or unmoral use he may make of these means. This from the viewpoint of man's responsibility.

The same is true of the terminus of life. While the Scripture teaches, as we have heard concerning God's dispensing providence in the direction of our lives, that the days of man are so determined that he cannot pass the appointed time and bounds (Job 14:5), it nevertheless often asserts that God, from the viewpoint of human responsibility, changes the natural limit of human life, of both the saints and the ungodly.

1) He may prolong the life of the godly as a reward for obedience. "Let thine heart keep the commandments; for length of days and long life and peace shall they add to thee" (Prov. 3:1-2). "Hear, O my son, and receive my sayings, and the years of thy life shall be many" (Prov. 4:10). "If thou wilt walk in my ways, I will lengthen thy days" (1 Kings 3:14). "The fear of the Lord prolongeth days" (Prov. 10:27). "Mine elect shall long enjoy the work of their hands" (Is. 65:22). "Because thou hast made the Lord thy habitation. . . . With long life will I satisfy him and show him My salvation." (Ps. 91.)

2) God may extend the life of His saints for the benefit of His kingdom. "I have heard thy prayer, I have seen thy tears. Behold, I will add unto thy days fifteen years. And I will deliver thee and this city out of the hand of the king of Assyria" (Is. 38:5-6), the Lord informed Hezekiah. And Paul told the Philippians, "For me to die is gain. . . . Nevertheless, to abide in the flesh is more needful for you. . . . I know that I shall abide and continue with you all for your furtherance and joy of faith" (Phil. 1:21-25).

3) God may shorten the life of the faithful to preserve him from great distress and evil. "None considering that the righteous is taken away [namely in death] from the evil to come" (Is. 57:1). "O that Thou wouldest hide me in the grave until Thy wrath be past" (Job 14:13). "Though He slay me, yet will I trust in Him" (Job 13:15).

4) God may shorten the life of the ungodly because of his wickedness. "And Er was wicked in the sight of the Lord, and the Lord slew him" (Gen. 38:7; cp. v. 10). "Bloody and deceitful men shall not live out half their days" (Ps. 55:23). "The years of the wicked shall be shortened" (Prov. 10:27).

Accordingly, men die either by the dispensing or by the permissive providence of God. If they make use of the appointed means, such as food, drink, clothing, piety, carefulness, obedience to God's laws, etc., then by the goodness of God they may attain the bound of life which God's dispensing providence has fixed. On the other hand, if they misuse or reject the prescribed means, transgress His holy laws, live wickedly and presumptuously, their life may be shortened by His permissive providence. Think of the premature death of Absalom and the suicide of his counselor Ahithophel. The suicide of Saul, who despised the Word of the Lord, and of Judas, who despised the Lord's Christ, belong to this category.

Yet whenever Holy Writ describes the terminus of life from the viewpoint of man's responsibility, this must always be viewed as a way of expression by which God adjusts Himself to our frail and feeble understanding, in order that we may use for our instruction, admonition, and comfort the truths which He has revealed for our temporal good and eternal salvation. God Himself is immutable in His being and decrees. What appears to us as either a shortening or lengthening of life, has been a matter of His eternal foreknowledge, sovereignly decreed by His wisdom. To just and devout Simeon it "was revealed . . . that he should not see death before he had seen the Lord's Christ." "In other words, man dies exactly when God wills that he should die" (Mueller).

So nimm denn meine Haende  
 Und fuehre mich  
 Bis an mein selig Ende  
 Und ewiglich.  
 Ich will allein nicht gehen,  
 Nicht *einen* Schritt;  
 Wo du wirst gehn und stehen,  
 Da nimm mich mit.  
 In dein Erbarmen huelle  
 Mein schwaches Herz  
 Und mach es gaenzlich stille  
 In Freud' und Schmerz.

Wirst du in Huld und Gnaden  
 Mich huellen ein,  
 So werd' vor allem Schaden  
 Ich sicher sein.

Wenn ich auch gleich nichts fuehle  
 Von deiner Macht,  
 Du fuehrst mich doch zum Ziele  
 Auch durch die Nacht.  
 So nimm denn meine Haende  
 Und fuehre mich  
 Bis an mein selig Ende  
 Und ewiglich.

Yakima, Wash.