

## DOCTRINE FOR THE YOUNG

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# THE DIVINE PROVIDENCE

by the Rev. Douglas Taylor

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

These are 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 is usually called His Divine Providence. The Divine Providence means the rule or government of the Lord's Divine love and wisdom. When the Lord created the universe He acted *from* His Divine love *by means* of His Divine wisdom. So, also, 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 it. The Lord *provides* what is needed to keep all that He has created in order. He also provides what is needed to restore order when disorder appears on the scene.

Have you ever thought about the fact that we human beings are the cause of disorder in the world? We are the only part of the Lord's creation that can get out of order. All the lower creatures are permanently in the order of their lives, the pattern into which they were created. All plants and animals, for example, live and act according to the pattern of their genus 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 as human beings? It is that we should love the Lord first and our neighbor as ourselves. These 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. For this reason also, 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 goal of the Lord's creation 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 we consider what it means when we say that the Lord is love itself and wisdom itself. There are three characteristics of the Divine love: it wills that there be others outside of itself, who have nothing of divinity or infinity; 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 those others *eternally* happy. The Divine love is not content to make others happy temporarily, for a short time; it can only be satisfied when people are *eternally* blessed.

On the other hand, the Divine wisdom 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 it provides 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? Isn't it 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 this the same with all the laws of physics? They are descriptions of the way things work.

On the spiritual plane, also, the Lord operates according to certain ways or laws. These are not merely *rules*; they are *laws* that are predictable and reliable. They are, in fact, *laws* of the Divine Providence. The Lord's love always operates according to certain laws. He has now described these laws for us in the Heavenly Doctrines for the New Church, so that we can cooperate intelligently with Him.

These laws had to be revealed because many people apparently believe 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 pleas, or that when the Lord is angry with us, misfortunes happen to us in this life. But such misfortunes can be either curses or blessings. It all depends, not on the experiences themselves, but on our attitudes toward them. If we look at disappointments, frustrating situations, failures (even seemingly endless failures) from a merely natural and worldly viewpoint, 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, and 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 only the Lord can know what this eternal good is in particulars. “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, in hindsight—if we look for them and we believe in Providence. This is another law 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 and the change in our lives, these are of the Divine Providence. They are the spiritual and eternal good that have come out of the events. 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.