

Providence (2)

Problems and Difficulties Encountered by Belief in Divine Providence

Calvin states the Christian doctrine of Providence as follows:

"To make God a momentary Creator..... would be cold and barren..... we see the presence of divine power shining as much in the continuing state of the universe as in its inception..... therefore faith ought to conclude that he is also everlasting Governor and Preserver.. not only in that he drives the celestial frame.... but also in that he sustains, nourishes and cares for everything he has made."

Calvin's Institutes

1. Divine Sovereignty and Human Responsibility

a. We believe in Divine sovereignty... we also believe in human responsibility. There appears to be a contradiction between the idea of God's sovereignty and human responsibility... Scripture teaches that God in his sovereignty orders and controls all things, this includes human actions, in accordance with his own eternal purpose.

" Being predestinated according to the purpose of him who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will."

b. Scripture also teaches that God as judge, holds every man responsible for the choices he makes and the course of action he pursues. God's sovereignty and man's responsibility are taught side by side in the Scriptures.

For example:

- *We read Pharaoh hardened his heart. (Ex. 8:15)*
- *In Ex. 7:13 we read that the Lord hardened Pharaoh's heart.*

- *In 2. Samuel 1: 6 we read, " Saul killed himself by leaning on his spear. "*
- *in 1 Chronicles 10: 14 we read "the Lord killed him, therefore he slew him and turned the kingdom over to David, the son of Jesse."*

Sometimes we see God's sovereignty and human responsibility placed side by side, even in the same text... e.g. Luke 22:22

"And truly the Son of Man goeth (to his death) as it was determined; but woe unto that man by whom he is betrayed."

Man is a responsible moral agent, though he is also divinely controlled.
We believe in God's sovereignty and man's responsibility.

2. How can we explain the relationship between God's sovereignty and human responsibility?

a. Some modern theologians have reasoned (and there is no doubt reasoned falsely), that the only way to preserve the idea of man's freedom is to limit in some way, God's sovereignty.

These writers make statements such as...

God must take real risks if he makes free creatures (thousands, millions, trillions of risks if each creature makes thousands of morally significant free choices). No matter how shrewdly God acts in running so many risks, his winning on every risk would not be antecedently probable.

The Problem of Evil, R.M. Adams

Now I think, we will agree that such answers to this problem are inadequate, and completely fail to do justice to the Biblical data. To think that God has his "beliefs" about the future, but these beliefs may prove to be wrong, because of the unpredicted free actions of men is a flat denial of his sovereign omniscience. Such a "risky" view of divine providence is to be rejected.

b. A far more satisfactory way of looking at the question of Divine Sovereignty and Human Responsibility... it is the view taken by William Lane Craig in his book, *The Only Wise God.. The Compatibility of Divine Foreknowledge and Human Freedom.*

The position he takes, is not a new idea, I believe it can be traced back at least to the writings of the scholastic Luis D. Molina (1535 - 1600).

This position is not very easy to explain, but it is a way of trying to understand the relationship between Divine Sovereignty and Human Responsibility, through the concept of what is called "Middle Knowledge".

Step one, is to think of God's knowledge in three categories:

1. What is called "**Necessary Truth**" or we could say, Non-Contradictory Truth, i.e. the principles of philosophy, logic or mathematics etc. Knowledge such as $2 + 2 = 4$, where to say differently would involve a contradiction... where it would be illogical to say the opposite. A truth certifiable on logical grounds. Principles that always remain the same. It will always be true and unchanging for all time that $10 \times 10 = 100$. Truths that

cannot be altered without breaking fixed principles or laws.

2. What is called "**Free Knowledge**". For example the fact that London is the capital of England, or 1066 is the date of the Battle of Hastings. Things that are true because God has willed them true. Another name for "Free Knowledge" is "Contingent Truth". Things that are true, but the opposite is not a contradiction or illogical. For example we could say King Alfred burnt the cakes.. God willed it that Alfred on that day would burn the cakes. But without being illogical, God might have willed it that King Alfred did not burn the cakes, and that they were delicious! God is free to bring the events to pass as he wills.

3. In between these two positions is what is called "**Middle Knowledge**". That is, the knowledge that God has of all possibilities. Things that might have happened had God so willed them. For example, God might have willed that Birmingham be the capital of England and foreseen a whole set of consequences arising out of that fact. A wholly different view of history and people's lives would have ensued if that had been the case. But God has not chosen to do this. God's knowledge of possibilities which he in his wisdom and goodness wills to actualise in the world form the very circumstances and events we inhabit and experience. It is like saying that God sees all the possible possibilities and by his free predestinating wisdom works out one particular pathway through all these possible events.

Two Bible passages that we might be use to illustrate this concept could be: 1 Samuel 23: 7-13 and Matthew at 11: 20 - 24.

The 1 Samuel 23 passage is about David in the city of Keilah. Saul is pursuing him. He knows David is in Keilah and sets out to besiege the city. David, hearing of Saul's intention seeks the Lords guidance saying:

9. And David knew that Saul secretly practised mischief against him; and he said to Abiathar the priest, bringing hither the ephod.

Then said David, O LORD God of Israel thy servant hath certainly heard that Saul Seeketh to come to Keilah, to destroy the city for my sake.

Will the men of Keilah deliver me up into his hand? Will Saul come down, as thy servant hath heard? O LORD God of Israel, I beseech thee tell thy servant. And the Lord said. He will come down.

Then said David, will the men of Keilah deliver me and my men into the hands of Saul? And the Lord said. They will deliver thee up.

Then David and his men, which were about six hundred, arose and departed out of Keilah, and went whithersoever they could go. And it was told Saul that David was escaped from Keilah; and he forebare to go forth.

And David abode in the wilderness in strongholds, and remained in a mountain in the wilderness of Ziph. And Saul sought him every day but God delivered him not into his hand.

The point being made is that the Lord knew that if David were to remain in the city, Saul would come for him. And as a consequence of that if Saul were to arrive, the men of Keilah would hand David over to him.

In other words, God saw at least two scenarios here: he could have chosen to bring to actuality one and not the other.

In the text in Matthew 11:20 - 24, we have the same sort of thing. Our Lord says that if his mighty works had been performed in impenitent Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented.

Paul Helm summarises this view:

It is as if God has before his mind's eye innumerable files. Each of these views is consistent and complete. Each one represents a possible segment of the universe. God surveys all the files, and selects those which together, from that universe, which in his wisdom and goodness, he wills to bring to pass. Among the files are those which contain references to human free actions in certain circumstances. God actualises those files which refer to circumstances which, if the individuals are placed in them, and act freely, they will choose in accordance with the end God desires. Thus, it is said, human freedom is preserved, and the "no risk" view of Providence it is also preserved.

The Providence of God, p.59

Philip Doddridge seems drawn towards the view in his "Lectures".

He writes,

It seems strange that many who grant God's universal future knowledge of what they call Scientia Media, or hypothetical foreknowledge, that is the knowledge of what would follow, upon some certain suppositions which are not fact, e.g. how King George would have active acted if he had been Emperor of Germany, or the Emperor if he had been King of Great Britain, or how any child who died in infancy would have behaved, if he had grown up to manhood. To object that this would suppose the Divine Mind to be filled with the vanity of vain speculation is very inconclusive, for it is difficult to say how God could in any instance select any scheme as best, if he had not the view of others with which it might be compared.

Again to quote Paul Helm on the subject of Middle Knowledge:

Middle Knowledge. This view maintains that God knows, not only what he will do, but what would happen in all the possible circumstances in which people with free will might be placed. It is in the light of the knowledge that God actualise that possible world which best fulfils his purposes.

ibid p. 196

Divine Sovereignty and Human Responsibility an Antinomy. (An apparent incompatibility between two truths)

Now while Mr Lane's view is helpful, most of us may prefer simply to view these complementary truths of God's sovereignty and man's responsibility as an antinomy. We can define the word antinomy as.. an appearance of contradiction between two principles both of which seem equally logical, reasonable or necessary. An appearance of contradiction but in fact not a contradiction.

It is clear that the Scriptures teach both the sovereignty of God and the free agency of man. Both are true, logical and reasonable. Both are necessary, but there is an apparent contradiction between them, when we try and explain how they fit together. They are seemingly impossible to reconcile, yet both undeniable.

By way of an example some writers quote the fact that in physics there is convincing evidence that light consists of waves, but there is equally convincing evidence that light consists of particles. It is not known how light can be both waves and particles, but the evidence is there, and so these two seemingly incompatible positions must be held together, and both must be accepted as true.

This is the view Spurgeon took and he expresses it as follows:

Shall we never be able to drive into men's minds the truth that predestination and free agency are both facts? Men sin as freely as birds fly in the air, and they are altogether responsible for their own sin; and yet everything is ordained and foreseen by God. The foreordination of God in no degree interferes with the responsibility of man. I have often been asked by persons to reconcile the two truths. My only reply is... they need no reconciliation, for they never fell out. Why should I try to reconcile two friends? Prove to me that the two truths do not agree. In that request I have set you a task as difficult as that which you propose to me. These two facts are parallel lines; I cannot make them unite, but you cannot make them cross each other. Permit me also to add that I have long ago given up the idea of making all my beliefs into a system. I believe, but cannot explain I fall before the majesty of revelation and adore the infinite Lord.

Sermons Vol. 33 p.198. 1897

The Necessity to hold to both these Truths

We say that God's sovereignty is necessary to his being and holiness. If there is something over which his sovereignty does not extend, then he cannot be truly God. Also it would be an act of irresponsibility on the part of God to have made a universe which he could not fully control.

B.B. Warfield writes:

A God who could or would make a creature whom he could not or would not control, is no God. He would have ceased to be a moral being. It is an immoral act to make a thing that we cannot or will not control. The only justification in making anything is that we both can and will control it. If a man should manufacture a quantity of an unstable high explosive in the corridors of an orphanage and when the stuff went off seek to excuse himself by saying that he could not control it, no one would count his excuses as valid. What right had he to manufacture it, we would say, unless he could control it? He relieves himself of none of the responsibility for the havoc wrought, by pleading inability to control his creation. To suppose that God has made a universe... or even a single being.. the control of which he renounces, is to accuse him of similar immorality.

In regard to man's free agency, Christianity presupposes human responsibility. Unless there is a voluntary element in love, for example, love is not love, and God is not truly loved by his people.

What a stupendous mystery that is! Here is man, a finite creature, product of God's creative hand, walking here upon this earth in a body made of the dust of the ground. Yet this being, so contemptible as he might at first sight seem, possesses the strange and terrible gift of personal freedom, and is capable of personal companionship with the infinite and eternal God. That the Bible certainly means when it says that God created man in his own image.

The Christian Doctrine of Man p.145

To sum up briefly the truths this antinomy safeguards:

- a. God does not will human actions as if we were puppets or computers. (Theological determinism).
- b. God does not permit human actions as if he surrenders complete control to us.
- c. But he wills to permit human actions in such a way as he remains sovereign yet uncontaminated by sin, and we remain free in our deeds, and accountable to him as our judge.

Other points relating to Difficulties connected with the Doctrine of Providence that is, of its relation to what is commonly called Fatalism

We must maintain that the Christian Doctrine of Providence is to be distinguished from what is commonly known as "fatalism".

The error which teaches that all things happen by a mechanical predetermined fate, has something in common with the true doctrine of Providence, i.e. that all things are

absolutely predetermined.

But on the other hand, there is all the difference in the world between the certainty of mechanical fate and the certainty of the divine decree.

G.I..Williamson says:

Mechanical fate is at its very heart meaningless, merciless and hopeless. But the certainty of divinely ordered Providence is meaningful, merciful and hopeful.

The Westminster Confession of Faith for Study Classes. p. 47

Spurgeon puts it like this:

I hear one say "Well sir you seem to be fatalist!" *no, far from it. There is just this difference between fate and providence. **Fate is blind; Providence has eyes.** Fate is blind; a thing that must be; it is just a low shot from an arrow, that must fly onward, but hath no target. Not so Providence; Providence is full of eyes. There is a design in everything and an end to be answered; all things are working together, and working together for good. They are not done because they must be done, but they are done because there is some reason for it. It is not only that the thing is, because it must be, but the thing is because it is right it should be. God hath not arbitrarily marked out the world's history; he had an eye to the great architecture of perfection, when he marked all the aisles of history, and placed all the pillars of events in the building of time.*

Sermons Vol 4 p187

See Boettner, The Reformed Doctrine of Predestination p.32 for the difference between Mohammedan and Christian views.

Providence and the Problem of Evil

One of the difficulties we face in bringing these truths to men and women today it's the general spiritual impatience and short sightedness of modern man.

There is a sense of hurry and breathlessness that characterises much of life today and people tend to be incapable of taking large views of events or of having the wide historical perspective that is so very necessary if we are to make sense of human experience.

A proper appreciation of God's providence requires us often to take long term unhurried views of his actions. The problems of Providence are by their very nature liable to misunderstanding through hurry and impatience. The moral government of

the universe must necessarily involve lengthened processes, and many factors lie hidden that only time reveals.

We need to teach our people to take these long term views of the ways and purposes of God.

'A day with the Lord is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day.'

If we think of some of the blessings that fell upon God's people in Old Testament times, we see that some of the promises of God were many years in coming to pass:

God's promise to Abraham of a son.

The promised possession of the Land of Canaan.

The promise of the Messiah.

Likewise the judgements of God were often a long time coming:

To those who sinned in the time of Noah, before the Flood.

God's judgements on the Amalekites, and Canaanites.

We need to take longer views of God's providential purposes.

Think of the long years of preparation for the coming of our Lord.

The raising up of the Jews, their instruction in the Law, the sacrifices and offerings, their seclusion and separation from the pagan tribes round about. God's Providence is not in a hurry.

Plummer says:

To some, God's Providence is full of mystery, because at times he works so slowly, and then again, at other times, so quickly. Sometimes he takes scores of years and even hundreds of years to effect a purpose. Again at other times he cuts short the work of righteousness.

From the day that Joseph is sold to the Ishmaelites till he and his brethren are reconciled there pass four and twenty long years, while in less than twenty four hours, Daniel is delivered from the lion's den and from the fearful conspiracy against him. The Babylonian captivity lasted seventy years, and yet in probably less than seventy minutes Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego are brought out of the fiery furnace unhurt. " My times are with Thee, O God."

God takes his own time and is never in a hurry, and is never slack as some men account these things. One day is with the Lord as a thousand years and a thousand years as one day.

Secondly, there seems to be a certain sentimentality that evidences itself in an extremely sensitive recoil from suffering of any kind.

The problem of pain seems to be very pronounced and exaggerated in many people's minds. There is in these days a kind of sentimental, futile protest against the sorrows and struggles that make up men's experiences in this world. Modern man refuses to see any point purpose in ills that beset life's pathways. Former generations accepted life's trials far more robustly and recognized them as God's instruments of moral training and spiritual growth.

Thomas Boston is a fine example of an earlier generation's attitude to suffering...

The crook in the lot gives rise to many acts of faith and love, self-denial, resignation and other graces, to many heavenly breathings, pantings, and groanings, which otherwise would not be brought forth.

The Crook in the Lot.

The bruising of grapes produces the sweetest vintage. Newton's hymn is a classic example of this.

*I asked the Lord that I might grow
In faith, and love, and every grace;
Might more of his salvation know,
And seek more earnestly his face.*

*'Twas he who taught me thus to pray,
And he, I trust, has answered prayer;
But it has been in such a way
As almost drove me to despair.*

*I hoped that in some favoured hour,
At once he'd answer my request:
And by his love's constraining power,
Subdue my sins, and give me rest.*

*Instead of this, he made me feel
The hidden evils of my heart,
And let the angry powers of hell
Assault my soul in every part.*

*Yea, more, with his own hand he seem'd
Intent to aggravate my woe;*

*Cross'd all the fair designs I schemed,
Blasted my gourds, and laid me low.*

Another example we could cite comes from Herbert Butterfield who in his famous *Christianity in History* wrote:

Indeed it would appear that only in a world where a vicarious suffering is attainable, can human beings measure the heights and depths of love and reach the finer music of life. Because there is tragedy in history, love itself is brought to burn with an intenser flame in human experience.

p. 116

Dr Ronald Dunn has these wise words to say on the problem of the silence of God in suffering:

I think this is the hardest part of all. You can take just about anything, if you know why. Everywhere I go, every meeting, I'm asked - why?.. I'm going to tell you something: God will very seldom answer your question of why. It is not that there are no answers, it is just that you and I probably would not be able to comprehend the answers if God were to tell us, and besides that, we have to learn to trust him without knowing why. When we ask him questions, what we are usually doing is saying, "Lord explain yourself", calling God to account.

Walking with the King, p 173

"Afflictions", says Matthew Henry "are continued no longer than till they have done their work." It is our responsibility to pray that our afflictions will be sanctified to us.

We need to remind our people and ourselves that the Lord sends both blessings and trials. Due to the influence of some in the charismatic movement, many believers have trivialised and debased the whole idea of God's providential working in the lives of believers.

If I might give a personal illustration, I once gave a man of this persuasion, a lift in the car. We arrived at a crowded car park, then another vehicle pulled out and we, very conveniently drove into the vacated place. On getting out, my passenger got very excited at this wonderful divine intervention, and thereupon bowed his head and gave thanks to God this remarkable provision!

Now sadly some people live on this spiritual level. They get things out of all perspective. God surely does intervene in our lives undoubtedly in the small things as well as in the big things and yes we should be thankful for all his mercies great and small. God however wants us to think of his interventions in altogether bigger and much more mature terms. He wants us to see his hand at work and providing for our

needs, sustaining us in Christian work, and correcting us by his various disciplines. But seeing God's Providential hand in our lives is not to remain at the level of the selfish counting of endless trivial divine interventions cushioning our lives from all strain and irritation. We are to learn to see even in the common things of life it's going to out and in the hand of God making us what we ought to be, for his praise and glory.

In Psalm 66 we see there the description of God working through the experiences of an individual's life his sanctifying and purifying purposes.

10. For thou, O God, hast proved us: thou hast tried us, as silver is tried.

11. Thou broughtest us into the net; thou laidst affliction upon our loins.

12. Thou hast caused men to ride over our heads; we went through fire and through water: but thou broughtest us out into a wealthy place.

There are many questions difficult and hard to answer in the doctrine of Providence; many mysteries impossible to fathom. Yet at the same time also we are surrounded by many wonderful proofs of God's love. It is the fact of Gods ever abiding love and wisdom that alone can sustain us when events seem at first sight to be hard and pointless.

*And in the maddening maze of things
When tossed by storm and flood;
To one fixed ground my spirit clings,
I know that God is good.*

Whittier

Augustine said, '*God would not have permitted evil unless he could bring good out of it.*'

Scripture gives as many examples of God bringing good out of evil. Focusing our attention on situations where sin and envy seem to plunge everything into utter darkness, but the dawn breaks, and we see that God was there all the time, and has overruled the tragedy and the tears, the loss and the heartache all for good. (See Romans 8)

I want now, for the rest of the time, to look at some well known scriptural examples of this.

1. The Doctrine of Providence illustrated in the life of Joseph (Gen 37-50)

Joseph, the son of Jacob is the keeper of his father's sheep. He dreams dreams, and he tells these dreams to his brothers. He believes that the dreams speak of his future greatness. His brothers are irritated by what he says.... their envy and resentment turns to hatred.

Eventually, alone with him in an isolated spot, their opportunity comes to get rid of him. At first their plan is to kill him, and to throw his body into a pit. However Rueben one of the brothers persuades them to throw him into the pit alive, with the intention of rescuing him later. At that moment a caravan of slave - traders appears and Joseph is sold to these Ishmaelites for 20 pieces of silver, and is taken to Egypt as a slave.

We know that in Egypt, Joseph experienced a mixture of...

despair
loneliness
success
temptation
false accusation
injustice
imprisonment

We know that the whole account is made up of...

unhappiness within a family
jealousy
strife
hatred
murderous intention
a broken-hearted father
bitterness and lies
institutionalised slavery
an unfaithful wife
imprisonment
famine and want
fear and worry
social upheaval

Yet out of the dark midnight of all this, the purpose of God is seen to have been accomplished. Because of it all, countless thousands are saved from starvation and Israel begins to be established as a nation etc. etc.

2. The Doctrine of Providence illustrated by the early life of Moses

Born into grinding poverty and persecution, his mother is forced to save his life by hiding him in the bulrushes at the water's edge. The baby is found by Pharaoh's daughter. She takes pity upon him, and takes him to be her own. Unwittingly she employs his own mother to bring him up. Subsequently Moses is educated in the universities of Egypt; trained up at Egypt's own expense, to be his people's deliver from Egyptian slavery and bondage.

God is at work in all these things. Through Pharaoh's bitter persecution of a nation, the murder of innocent children and attempted genocide. Here again is anxiety, tears, sin and death. Yet... through it all, God secret and wise and good purposes being worked out. Out of the travail of it all a nation is born by and through whom all the nations of the earth shall be blessed.

3. The Doctrine of Providence in the book of Esther

Here is the true story of the little orphan girl, an exile in a foreign land. Adopted by her uncle, destined to play a vital role in the saving of her people.

She suffers all the traumas of orphan hood.

She is an exile in a foreign land.

Her people have a cruel enemy- Haman, who seeks to destroy them.

By a remarkable sequence of events, Esther eventually becomes the Queen of Persia.

The enemy Haman is hanged and her people are saved from death.

Within the story we see...

The insatiable pride of the wicked Haman.

A despotic oriental monarch: Ahasuerus.

A sleepless night.

Months of worry and distress for the people of God.

Contemplated genocide.

Drunken revelry on the part of a pagan king.

In all this, God is not only saving his people but preparing the way for their advancement and final return to their own land.

4. The account of the Hebrew youths in the Book of Daniel

The sad account of the young men Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego carried away captive to Babylon. Victims of the cruelties of war... an example of man's inhumanity to man. An example of the exploitation and attempted spoiling of youth.

God however uses these young men to declare his Name in the very centre of paganism, Babylon.

The experience of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego in the burning fiery furnace, yet remarkably preserved...causes Nebuchadnezzar to acknowledge God, and say

Therefore I make a decree, that every people, nation and language, which speak anything amiss against the God of Shadrach Meshach and Abednego, shall be cut in pieces and their house made a dunghill, because there is no other God that can deliver after this sort. (3:29)

And later, the more mature confession:

And I blessed the most High, and I praised and honoured him that liveth for ever, whose dominion is an everlasting dominion, and his kingdom is from generation to generation. (4:34)
See E.J. Young, Daniel p.114

5. The doctrine of Providence illustrated by Ezekiel

The famous wheels of Ezekiel chapter 1 are an illustration of the doctrine of Providence. The prophet sees the windstorm and the whirlwind coming from the north, an immense cloud with flashing lightning and surrounded with brilliant light.

Out of the cloud appeared the likeness of four living creatures. Each had four faces, for wings with hands under their wings; their feet straight like those of calves or oxen. The four faces were like the faces of.. a man... a lion... an ox... and an eagle.

When they moved, they moved straightforward, as directed by the Spirit; they did not turn as they went. (i.e. nothing could divert them or put them off course).
These creatures we can take as representing:

Wisdom..... strength..... obedience..... swiftness.

These can be taken, says one commentator (Hillis Reed) to represent:

The ministers of Providence, angels, with ready wings to obey the behests of heaven, intent on their errands of mercy or wrath; turning neither to the right-hand or to the left, subject to no mistakes, hindered by no obstructions, and all their movements directed by one great mind. "Whither the Spirit was to go, they went: they run and return as the appearance of a flash of lightning..."

Next, Ezekiel sees beside the creatures, a vision of intersecting wheels.... wheels within wheels.

Each had four faces, looking every way, moved in every direction, were connected to the living creatures and moved in perfect harmony with them. (v 16)

Full of eyes, they never moved blindly or by chance.(v 18). Their operations, though endlessly diversified in detail, were all united in harmonious action. They moved forwards and onwards, never turning aside or back. Their rims were high and awesome. Their purpose was as high as heaven, and extended through all eternity.

Providence compared to the Ocean

The general appearance of this singular mechanism was like unto the colour of a Beryl, azure, ocean like. Providence like the ocean! An apt and beautiful allusion. The ocean, broken only here and there by few large patches of land, stretching from pole to pole, and from equator to equator; he is all pervading, never at rest, irresistible.

Whether lashed into fury by the storm, or sleeping tranquillity on its coral bed, it is accomplishing its destined end. It washes every land; its vapours suffuse the entire atmosphere; its waters, filtered through the earth, brought to our door, and distributed through every hill and valley.

And such is Providence; a deep unfathomable deep, none but the Omniscient eye can fathom it; none but infinite Wisdom can scan its secret recesses; so boundless, everywhere active, all influential, that none but the infinite Mind can survey and comprehend its wonderful operations; so mighty, all –controlling, irresistible, that nothing short of Omnipotence can guide it. Like the sea, Providence has its ebbs and flows, its calms and tempests, its depressions and elevations. At one time we ride on the swelling bosom of prosperity. The tide of life runs high and strong. The sunbeams of health and joy glisten in our tranquil waters, and we scarcely fear a disturbing change. Again the tide sets back on us. Disappointment, poverty, sickness, bodily or mental affliction, throw life and all its enjoyments in the ebb. We are tossed on the crested billow, or lie struggling beneath the overwhelming wave. Like the sea, Providence is not only the minister of the Divine mercy, but of the divine displeasure, executing judgements on the froward and disobedient: and Minister of discipline too, casting into the furnace of affliction, that it may bring out the soul seven times purified. We can see but little of its boundless surface, or sound but little of its unfathomable depths.

The Example of the Cross

And of course, to close, the most exalted and most stupendous example of God causing evil to work for good is our Saviour's Cross and Passion.

Evil men do their worst.

Judas sells his Lord for 30 pieces of silver.

The Pharisees exercise all their pompous malice and contempt.

Pilate exhibits abject weakness and fails in his duty.

There is the desertion of the disciples.
The fickleness of the crowd.
The brutality of the soldiers.

*Great Providence of heaven –
What wonders shine
In its profound display
Of God's design:
It guards the dust of earth,
Commands the hosts of above
Fulfils mighty plan
Of His great love*

*The kingdoms of this world
Lie in its hand:
See how they rise or fall
At its command!
Through sorrow and distress,
Tempestous storms that rage,
God's kingdom yet endures
From age to age.*

*Its darkness dense is but
A radiant light;
Its oft-perplexing ways
Are ordered right.
Soon all it's winding paths
Will end, and then the tale
Of wonder shall be told
Beyond the vale.*

David Charles 1762 - 1834