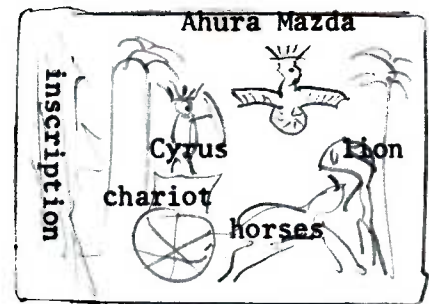


This thinksheet is about being honest-to-Providence, Jewish and Christian theology's middle axiom between Creation and Redemption. My pastoral concern comes from counseling a Jewish Auschwitzer who lost his faith at the gate of the Concentrationslge and a Christian couple who fell into utter despair when their faith "was not strong enough" to prevent her death by cancer.



1. Let's see, first, some things biblical Providence does not mean:

(1) It does not mean that the believer has talismaic self-protective power so as to lead a charmed life either positively (=guaranteed prosperity) or negatively (=guaranteed safety). The biblical world was full of magical charms and potions, and the biblical vision consistently rejected them.

(2) It does not mean that one's situation-in-life is graphable on an x/y axis, the more "x" of faith the more "y" of Shalom (Hebrew for total prosperity-peace-joy). Indeed, the reverse is closer to the truth. The profounder the faith, the deeper the trouble passive and active (i.e., the more one is troubled from beyond one's powers and the more one is willing to bear the burden of other's troubles). God would seem to be hard on us in proportion to our faith: woes and even death come upon prophets-Jesus-martyrs. Sardonicly one may say that the best protection against trouble is atheism, and keeping faith within reasonable limits will keep untowardnesses within reasonable limits. The worst thing you could do for yourself would be to be the Son, who not only suffers all the horrors of adversity and death but also takes on all the obloquy and anguish of the world. Some "Providence"!

(3) It does not mean that when I as believer fall into bodily affliction, I have an inside track toward healing. Closer to biblical trust would be to lie down to die, and then be full of surprise and praise if you survive. If you lie down to die, sooner or later you will be right: you will die. In fact, you'll die whether or not you ever lie down to. Neither life nor death is the issue.

2. Positively, "Providence" means:

(1) That my defects/damage/death are less important to me than something else, viz. God, who is--in Jesus' phrase--where my heart is and therefore my treasure. Providence is deliverance from the anguish of my ego-limitations and pains.

(2) Participation in the Spirit's groaning through the whole creation toward Shalom. This morning (20Sept81) it was our taking to church with us a young woman so brain-defective as to be at the utter mercy of others--her brain like a 7 1/2 - watt night-light to my 1,000 watt (which, however, sometimes gets turned down as low as 100 watts). Providence asks me the question not How protect yourself against life's limitations and vissitudes? but rather Where are you defiantly in action against others'cripplings and oppressions? Where are you "providential" for others, as your Lord was and is? (NOTE: Providential, not Messianic; for action which from God's side is messianic is from my side providential. One blessing of Providence is liberation from messianic pretensions and the bad fruits thereof.)

3. Etatism (=statism) is a government's assumption of divine status with implicit or explicit claim of special divine guidance (and powers) for the leader(s). The visual on this thinksheet makes this statement for Cyrus, whose signet-cylinder-impression it is. What you see here, exact size, is my rough transcription of my clay impression of the seal which in all probably was used on the document authorizing the Jews to return to Jerusalem from "the Exile." It is thus a sacramental of liberation. Note that the god is leading the king on a hunt, the god appearing as winged (as in virtually all Ancient Near East representations of the guiding-and-success/victory-giving deity). This god both is and is not the biblical God: there is the paradox and problem of "the doctrine of Providence."