



THE WORKINGS OF GOD (I)

Earlier, I used the term “semi-autonomous” with reference to the created universe because it does have observable processes which, once put in operation, tend to operate in a steady and predictable manner. Like an automobile engine, God designed the universe with natural systems that can function without constant intervention, just as you can start a motor and go off and leave it for awhile. However (and here is the major point of contention with “science” when it is based on philosophical materialism and naturalism), as we can “intervene” to accelerate, stop, or engage the engine and a transmission system, so God can intervene to speed up, slow down, or bypass natural processes if He chooses to. The Bible says that He has done that and such events could be labeled “special providence” and “miracle.” Divine interventions into otherwise “natural systems” are not impossible or even “illogical,” just unacceptable to those who have embraced philosophical materialism and naturalism as true. This view assumes that the universe is a closed system of uniform natural processes ONLY (essentially, evolutionists view an intervening God as “philosophically incorrect”). The late Carl Sagan was preaching this in his “Cosmos” book and video series when he proclaimed that,

The Cosmos is all that is or ever was or ever will be.ⁱ

On the other hand, we believe that God exists, creates, and rules over it all. However, let me clarify something. While I reject the atheism/materialism/naturalism viewpoint, I am also uncomfortable with those who overdose on “intervention” to the point that they claim they are seeing “miracles” everyday and that this is how God “normally” operates. This view tends to ignore the reality of the created “natural order” and cheapens the quality of real miracles. Islam holds that “Allah” upholds the universe by a “continuous miracle,” but the Bible does not portray such a view. Rather, it seems to “cluster” the miracles and interventions around key events – credentialing key spokesmen and establishing major covenants. This is why most of the miracles recorded in the Bible were clustered around Moses/Joshua (exodus – conquest) and Jesus/Apostles! Gideon and his generation certainly had not seen miracles for quite a while (Judges 6:13) and Jesus commented on the rarity of miracles during the Israelite divided monarchy era (Luke 4:25-27). Even during the period when God was communicating “in many portions and ways” (Hebrews 1:1), there were times when such communication was “rare” (1Samuel 3:1). I suspect that most of the claimed “miracles and revelations” today are best classified with the baloney being handed out in Jeremiah’s time (Jeremiah 14:14; 23:16,21,25,26,30-32). When real miracles occurred, even unbelievers had to admit that they happened (Acts 4:16), whereas today many believers are not in agreement on whether or not anything miraculous is occurring. Along with many believers, the unbelieving world is not

fooled by the excuses that somebody didn't "have enough faith" or was miraculously healed but then "doubted their healing and lost it." Neither can any good come from claiming "miraculous healings" when all of the visible realities say "nothing has changed" – that is simply delusion and God is not glorified.

The other extreme, materialism/naturalism, denies that God exists or has ever intervened into the natural order – no creation, no miracles, etc. Arising from the French Enlightenment, this line of thought granted "total sovereignty" to natural processes and came to believe it was necessary to "de-mythologize" the Bible by removing all references to supernatural events – all of the bona fide interventions were "explained away" as non-events. This isn't done on the basis of evidence, but because of philosophical commitments.

Somewhere in the middle needs to be the recognition that human free-will (expressed in bad choices, rebellion, sin, etc.) is a major player in the question of "evil" and does not prove God's non-existence, but could indicate that the all-powerful God has chosen to limit His exercise of power so as not to manipulate all things – *sovereignty* can also be expressed by bringing rebels to judgment at a later date. While we can (and should) understand what God has revealed, can intervene, and should rejoice if great healings or rescues occur, God's working in the world is often not clear-cut and as simple as we would like it to be (Job 38-42; Isaiah 55:8,9). Even those through whom God worked mightily had to have wondered about some things as the years rolled by – Abraham endured a number of years between the promise of a son and Isaac's birth (Genesis 12-21), Joseph endured thirteen strange years of blessing and hardship in Egypt (Genesis 37:2 & 41:46) before he could see what God was doing (Genesis 45:1-9), and John's prison time made him re-think his earlier testimony to Jesus as the Messiah (Matthew 11:2,3). There are those times when, like Job, we do not understand (and may not "deserve") the trials and suffering we encounter. Like Asaph (Psalm 73) and Habakkuk, we struggle with the apparent "success" of the wicked and the apparent absence or slowness of Divine justice. Why does God allow foolishness, poor management, and even corruption to continue for years in some churches, Christian colleges, and parachurch organizations? Why does God allow some churches to "wear-out/beat up" sincere and capable servants on the one hand, while letting power-hungry, lazy, and/or doctrinally unsound "preachers" stifle or ruin good churches? As in Psalm 10:1 and 13:1, there are those times when we do not sense the closeness of God, we do not see any rescue or divine providence working things out as we would like, and we feel forgotten. The whole point of Romans 8:28 is encouraging believers to plod on "in faith" – trusting that God can and does eventually work good out of those things which to us don't look very promising right now. That was also the message of Paul to the Church in Corinth - we walk by "faith" rather than by what we see right now (2Corinthians 5:7). (to be continued)

ⁱ Carl Sagan, Cosmos (New York: Random House, 1980), p. 4.