

## Second Thesis

*God does not often, if ever, personally intervene in human affairs.*

*God is not in a pop tart box accessible for making us feel good or for favors or cures. If we allow that God does so intervene, how would you explain all those who are not “blessed” by cures and favors?*

I divided the Thirty Theses into categories in what is probably a very shoddy imitation of systematic theological approaches. My Thirty Theses fall into the following categories:

- 1-7 God the Mother/Father/Parent
- 8-12 Jesus
- 13-16 Salvation
- 17-21 Good and Evil
- 22-25 Prayer
- 26-29 Scripture
- 30 Angels (which I called in my sermon, Miscellaneous)

I did not deal with the third person of the Godhead, the Holy Spirit, in my sermon. I have no explanation to offer for the omission.

It was and is very difficult for me to say that I believe that God does not often, if ever, personally intervene in human affairs. In my weaker moments, I desperately want to believe that God will swoop down (like a war time rescue helicopter) and rescue me from my sad circumstances. It would be comforting in one way to believe that if I just prayed enough or in the right way, God would heal me or mine, or make it rain on my garden, or be on my side in an argument or a war. On the other hand, it would be disconcerting to believe that, because then every time God didn't swoop in and fix things I would be left with the supposition that I had not prayed well enough or behaved well enough to merit intervention.

I know that many of you are immediately going to label me a Deist. I don't care if you do, mind you. I would be in grand company (and I can add put up the plaque next to the “agnostic” one). Thomas Jefferson and Benjamin Franklin are often associated with Deism (although they may have been only casual adherents). I've seen one source that said Thomas Paine was a Deist, but I think he may have been offended by the attribution. I think he maintained that he was an atheist (I'm not sure). In any event, just because I share one tenet of Deism does not make me a Deist. But, as the children's aphorism goes, sticks and stones may break my bones, but names will never hurt me.

There are several reasons why I cannot hold to the belief that God intervenes personally in our lives. Let me start by saying that I cannot fathom a God that would personally engineer all the minute details of everything that happens in the universe. I hear people say things like, “The Lord was looking out for me and helped me find a good parking place.” Now really. A parking place? Hail Mary, full of grace, help me find a parking place? No. I just can't accept a God who cares where we park – or other similarly mundane matters. And if God doesn't control the

mundane matters, would God, could God, control more important things? Where is the cutoff? Is there an economic test? Is there a piety test?

The same doubt then follows statements like, “Jesus blessed me with a beautiful spouse and great, obedient children... a wonderful job.” If Jesus and God are active in such ways, I’d much prefer a slightly uglier spouse, rowdier children and a mean boss balanced by a generous sprinkling of world peace. I won’t go into much more detail because another of the Theses (number three) has to do with “blessings” and the like, but I have to address the issues here to some degree. A younger, more conservative me believed that God, being infinite and all, could easily accommodate the logistical universe of keeping up with all the wants and needs of billions of creatures. As I grew older, I started to realize that even if God were able to and wanted to babysit all of us, there was at least a serious problem with God’s prioritization skills. Somehow, God was blessing Jim Baker with wheelbarrow loads of money, and yet there were homeless people in downtown Charlotte. Did God just not love them as much? Again, I’ll address this topic later, but you see my dilemma.

In addition to my problem with how or why God would personally intervene in creation – especially with human needs and wants (as though God were some sort of cosmic Santa Claus), it seems to me that the pervasive belief (or so it seems) that God acts in such a way at least results (assuming it isn’t some big conspiracy of the rich) in dangerous and damaging social conditions. The rich don’t have to bear any obligation to their fellow human beings because (a) God gave them their riches so they have a right to them (like the divine right of kings) and (b) the poor are poor because God wants them that way. After all, the poor are with you always. And the poor are kept more or less under control for the same reason – God made you poor so you must not have “earned” any more blessings and God gave the rich their money so how can you complain about that? Is this peculiarly Protestant? Or is it common to all Christianity? Anyway, if we can blame – er, I mean praise God for our blessings or lack thereof, then our responsibilities as humans and, therefore, as part of societies are lessened. That may be correct, but I find it incomprehensible as a facet of a rational theology and I reject it.

Back to the presumed accusation of Deism... I have not yet gotten to the point where I think that God does not intervene at all in creation. No Divine Watchmaker for me (yet). But I’m very unsure of this part. It seems to me that God may play an integral role in creation. I think it very much depends on who or what God is and I am, as I have already discussed in nauseating detail, agnostic on those points. But let’s just look at a few options for fun.

If God is that Schleiermachian web (and some of you ought to be checking me on what I say about Schleiermacher, I could be completely bonkers), then God would certainly have an effect on the world and on world events. That is, if God is the interlinking network of all that is good about us as individuals – the unification of our individuality – then isn’t God also the interlinking network of *what we do that is good*? Not just our ethereal goodness? And so, the collective good works of humankind (can anyone identify any?) would be the good works of God. I am only half jesting when I question whether or not humanity could produce a collective work of good, because, clearly, the eradication of smallpox is a collective good, no? and similar advancements of humankind? Now if we could get to work on that global warming thing... Alas, however, surely if Schleiermacher’s God is the collective good of humankind, then his

devil is the collective evil. And, ah, how we love our evil. And also, because the level at which the collective good can be identified is so high, it is very difficult, I think, for the individual to see her place in the overall network and, thus, it is difficult for her to consciously play her part.

But let's say that God is more of a Gnostic model and exists in each individual. Then God's good works are easier to see on a microcosmic level. If you hold the door for me, God has blessed me. In this scenario, the individual can be conscious of her part of acting divinity. We are kind, civil and polite to each other because we recognize that we are all part of a whole and we recognize the divinity in each other. Of course the drawback is that not everyone plays the game and you get a huge amount of free riding. Additionally, you have those all too frequent acquaintances whose egos know no bounds and who are most happy to assume the position of deity. So there are problems, but at least you can see how God intervenes. There is no more poignant example than those folks in WWII Europe who risked their lives – and often died – to save their neighbors from death. Surely there moved the hand of Adonai.

What I can't comprehend, or even picture, is a "divine other" God, a divinity of other existence, who pokes and prods creation, answering prayers here, preventing wars there, healing sickness now, making wealth then – with such incredibly inequitable results. (Again, I'm scheduled to discuss my issues with the concept of God as "divine other" when I write about the Fourth Thesis, but its tie here requires some address.) I'm sure that there are those who would tell me that just because we can't see the reasons for God's actions doesn't mean that those actions are not just (equitable). But I think that reasoning is usually quite circular: God is a separate divinity. God cures some but not all. God's actions are just because God is God and God only acts justly. It's a tight system but not terribly convincing to me. I've heard an expression, that some folks would "make excuses for the devil." Well. It seems to me that worshippers of this type of God must spend a good amount of time making excuses for God.

So, while I can accept that God (in whatever form) may take action in or on creation on some macro-levels, I do not believe that God finds me a parking place, or helps me lose weight (if only!) or will find me a loving spouse. I wish I could believe that – because in most ways, I expect that makes life much less arbitrary. Or, I should say, it would make the arbitrary nature of life easier to bear because then you could believe that there was at least some divine albeit humanly incomprehensible plan behind the apparent arbitrariness. But I think it probably also makes life less of an adventure. I don't know. I think predetermination doesn't make me happy – only safe. So I would prefer to think that I have some say about finding a loving spouse, and it isn't just God making an arranged marriage or worse – failing to make an arranged marriage for me. To the extent I am unattractive to potential spouses, if so, or am unlovable or even just uninterested, I think it would be worse to think that an allegedly infallible God had made me so. (At some point in these articles I'll most likely return to the predetermination dilemma, probably on the other side!)

I don't know if you can believe that God intervenes without believing that you don't have much free will. If God intervenes but only on occasion, then how does God make the decision about when to intervene? How would I know when God is about to swoop in and mess about with my life? And doesn't that also engender a lack of caution? If I'm absolutely convinced that when I'm about to really mess up God is going to dive bomb in and fix everything up like some upper

middle class, yuppie, college parent when their collegiate Christ child is about to get in trouble at school... then don't I become rather lackadaisical about my decisions? Of course, no one really believes that, do they? No one really believes that God is reliable in God's interventions. Most people have sufficient experience of life to realize that God has not, in fact, kept them away from all misery – even if they think God allowed them to suffer for their own good. And what, pray tell, do you do with the obvious evidence of all those other children of God out there suffering unimaginable horrors? Was God napping?

I believe that if I experience the intervention of the hand of God, then it is most likely to be because someone has held out her hand to me in friendship. If I hear the voice of God, it's probably because someone has told me that I matter to her. If I see the face of God, it is almost certainly because I have seen a smile on the face of someone I love. Maybe it's some sort of Schleiergnostic God, but it is a God I can perceive. Depending on my fellow travelers for my experience of God's intervention does not increase the reliability of that intervention, but I do think that it increases the sweetness of the grace.

**[There will be a separate thread on the discussion forum for sharing your thoughts on this Second Thesis. Please feel free to share your own understandings, etc., there.]**