



The Atheist, the Ensemble and the Providence of God

This unusual testimony affirms the power of prayer.

Manfred E. Kober

The providence of God is God's superintendence and care over His creation and creatures. Though we do not understand the mode of divine operation in the natural and moral world, Scripture and experience demonstrate that providence is both necessary and real. God "worketh all things after the counsel of his own will" (Eph. 1:11) to a predetermined goal. The whole course of events in the universe is directed by a wise God toward a predetermined end. The God Who is mindful of every sparrow that falls to the ground and Who numbers the hairs of our heads (Matt. 10:29, 30) is actively involved in the minutest details of the lives of His creatures. While man is morally responsible to this holy God, God sovereignly controls the means and end of His all-encompassing and all-wise plan. Sometimes our gracious God demonstrates in an unmistakable fashion how He works in individuals and events to accomplish His purpose. I experienced one such forceful demonstration of divine providence this past summer.

In the spring of 1991, the administration of Grandview Park Baptist School in Des Moines asked me

to plan and host a European concert tour for their high school ensemble under the direction of Tim Nilius. All year the young people and their parents worked hard to raise the funds for the 17-day evangelistic tour. From May 26 to June 11 we toured seven European countries, with concerts in the Netherlands, former East Germany (my former home country), West Germany, Austria and Switzerland.

As we expected, the Europeans responded warmly to the splendid sacred music. The 12 young people in the ensemble and the 15 other tour members were greatly challenged by the spiritual need of Europe. Perhaps some of the high schoolers—seven of whom now attend Faith Baptist Bible College—will return to Europe as missionaries.

Assisting pastors and missionaries in their outreach was a great privilege. Eternity alone will reveal the full impact of the ensemble's ministry, but God in His grace allowed us to see one remarkable response to the spoken and sung Word.

After the ensemble returned home, three of the tour members joined me for a few more days. We went back to Eastern Germany for an additional musical ministry. Furthermore, we

made numerous visits to my friends and relatives. On one especially busy day, for which we had scheduled eight visits, we started our day's itinerary by seeing a godly couple in the town of Schönfels. They live in a quaint, half-timbered house at the foot of an ancient castle. When we arrived, only Herr Wutzler, a retired artist, was home, painting exquisite plaster figurines.

After an exchange of pleasantries ("Guten Morgen!" "Wie geht's?"), he asked whether I had heard of the most unusual occurrence in his town. I responded with the observation that I didn't think anything unusual had happened in this sleepy village since the bears escaped from the castle moat around 1245.

Herr Wutzler excitedly told me of a singular event that had left the town amazed and astonished.

One of the most godly women in the fundamental church in town is Frau Anneliese Lorenz. Married to a convinced communist and avowed atheist, her life had been most difficult. The Wutzlers and other members of the congregation joined her in prayer for her husband's salvation. Apparently Herr Lorenz had never been to church and had resisted all efforts to evangelize him. He thought

God Helped Me Love Them

June Morey

Five years ago my family started attending the Immanuel Baptist Church in Traverse City, Michigan. Our children had previously attended Awana clubs, and we wanted them to continue. The church had one small problem though—it needed more Awana workers. I felt children's ministries were not for me; but after some time spent in thought and prayer, I decided to volunteer.

I spent the first three years as the second-grade leader. The fourth year I served as both the second-grade leader and a helper to our director, for she gave birth to a baby in the middle of the Awana year. At the end of my fourth year, the director asked me if I would consider being co-director with her the next year. My first reaction was *no way!* I hadn't minded working in Awana, but I felt that I didn't love those kids enough. Also, by that time my children were out of Awana and in the youth group.

But I didn't have any peace about this decision, and the Lord kept speaking to me about it. I kept coming up with excuses and resisting the Lord's leading until finally one day I said, "OK, Lord, I'll do it. But You have to show me without a doubt that this is what I'm supposed to do because I know I don't have the love I need to work with those children."

Shortly after I prayed this prayer, our pastor phoned and told my husband that an unsaved mother who had been coming to Sparkies with her second-grade son had been saved. Through the Lord, the gospel and the friendship I had started with her, she had trusted the Lord as Savior. When I heard this news I thought, *Here's my answer to the challenge I had given to the Lord.*

I would like to tell you that from that moment on, I agreed to keep working in Awana. But I didn't. Throughout the whole summer I struggled with this decision. Finally, as time got closer, I realized I had to stop fighting and obey what God wanted me to do. So I told the Lord, "OK, You win. But You know I don't have the love I need to do this job, and I need You to supply it to me. I can't do it on my own."

Our Awana year extends from September through April. This last year we

had 70 children come to club at least once and hear the gospel. We had an average attendance of 30 to 40 children every week. We saw 15 come to know the Lord as their Savior. We had few discipline problems. We participated in many different activities throughout the year, and the Lord met every need we had. On the occasions when I asked Sparkies, "What's the one thing you don't like about Sparks, they would tell me they didn't like to go home. One second-grade girl told me she didn't want to move on to the bigger children's group unless I went too.

I am not boasting of myself, for I have discovered that without God I am nothing. I had many wonderful coworkers who worked hard too. But after I said yes to God and made the commitment, He gave me more love than I could spread around to all those Sparkies once a week. The abundance of love amazed me. It kept me forever humble before the mighty works of God.

Nevertheless, I had an adversary who didn't like what was going on in Sparks, so he decided to set up as many roadblocks as he could. Never before in my life have I had so many illnesses in my own body in one winter. I even lost the hearing in my right ear, a loss that appears to be permanent. Also, family members had several serious illnesses too. Satan kept busy! However, I can honestly say I am not sorry I said yes to God. I had days of discouragement, but then I realized that Satan wanted me to be discouraged, and God gave me the strength to get through one day at a time.

We had a closing program and had to say good-bye to our Sparkies. I almost couldn't bear to say good-bye, even though I was ready for the summer break. Where did this abundance of love come from? Where did the endurance come from? Not from me. How I praise the Lord for His abundance in all times of need!

The next time God calls you to do a new ministry, don't say no, because you will be the biggest loser of all by denying God a chance to show you how great His power is in all things!

it was all right that his wife, 15 years younger than he, attended church, but he needed neither God nor the gospel. He prided himself on being a man of reason, not superstition.

Herr Wutzler told me that he had received my personal invitation to attend the ensemble concert in my hometown of Falkenstein on May 31. Unfortunately, he and his wife were unable to come, but they had passed on my invitation to others in their church. One lady volunteered to drive the 25 miles to the 5:00 P.M. concert and asked if others wanted to ride with her. Frau Lorenz decided that she would ask her recalcitrant husband to join her, already sure how he would respond.

Arriving home from the morning service, she asked her husband with trepidation whether he would be interested in attending a concert by an American ensemble that afternoon. To her and everyone else's surprise he responded, "Das klingt interessant! Ich komme mit." ("That sounds interesting! I will come along.")

And he kept his promise, joining his wife and others for the concert at the Christuskirche. They sat in the first row of the balcony in the middle section, where I recall seeing them.

Herr Wutzler became progressively animated as he continued his account. From the first ensemble number to the last, Herr Lorenz sat totally enthralled by the young people and their music, and he wept throughout the entire concert as the Lord sovereignly worked in his heart. As he heard the gospel through the English and German songs and through my short devotional, the Lord opened his heart, and he responded in faith. By the time the ensemble reached the next-to-the-last number in the program—"O That Will Be Glory for Me"—he had the sweet assurance of salvation. He knew that when his labors and trials were over, he would meet his Lord on that beautiful shore. The One Whom he had before resisted and ridiculed had become, through personal faith in His shed blood, the Savior of Werner Lorenz.

After the concert, Frau Lorenz, expressing her absolute delight over

the salvation of her husband, came forward and hugged our daughter, Christa, the pianist for the group, as well as several other ensemble members. Then the folks from Schönfels drove back home, singing choruses and rejoicing in the fact that the Lorenzes were now one in Christ. The faithful witness of Werner's wife, Anneliese, had borne fruit. The prayers of many believers over many years had been wonderfully answered.

At this point in the story Herr Wutzler paused. Then he continued with a voice choked with emotion. Motioning to some tall trees about 200 yards away, Herr Wutzler related what happened the morning after the concert. After Frau Lorenz left for work, her 67-year-old and retired husband, in an uncommon act of altruism, decided to help an aged neighbor cut off branches high up in a tree that were dangerously close to some electrical and telephone wires. Herr Wutzler pointed at the tree, easily visible from where we were standing. It seems that Herr Lorenz climbed from the top of the ladder into the higher branches of the tree. Somehow he lost his grip and fell to the asphalt road surface about 40 feet below. No one witnessed the accident. A passing motorist alerted a doctor in town. For 40 minutes he and a nurse desperately attempted to sustain Werner Lorenz's vital functions while anxiously awaiting the medical helicopter. They carefully placed him into the helicopter, but all their efforts were in vain. Fifteen minutes later, on the way to the hospital, he slipped away—instantaneously arriving on that beautiful shore of which he had sung only hours earlier. How remarkable! An atheist in the morning, a believer in the afternoon and 15 hours later present with the Lord!

Herr Wutzler described to me the subsequent funeral for Werner Lorenz. God gave such joy to the widow and her family that they were able to praise the Lord through their tears. Practically the whole town attended the funeral, and the glorious conversion of Werner Lorenz became the topic of conversation

throughout the town. The widow had selected two of the songs from the ensemble repertoire. We had included these songs, knowing they are church favorites on both sides of the Atlantic. She selected "I Need Thee Every Hour" and "O That Will Be Glory for Me." The funeral was a time of testimony and rejoicing such as the town had never experienced.

Herr Wutzler then motioned to a vine-covered house up the road and said, "There lives the lady who rejoices that while she has lost her husband, she has really eternally gained him."

I asked Herr Wutzler whether he thought Frau Lorenz might be home. He, knowing just about everything about everyone in town, was sure she was. We went over, and I rang the doorbell. She recognized us instantly. Delightedly she called her daughter, Anka, and introduced us to her. She was excited and surprised that some of the people from the tour were still in Europe. She invited us

into her living room, and we expressed to her our heartfelt sympathy. Her face glowed throughout our conversation. What a blessing to see the grace of God manifest itself in the trials of life.

Frau Lorenz filled in many of the details for us. She knew that her husband was under conviction when song after song brought tears to his eyes. She was sure a change had taken place when he joined the congregation in singing a stanza of the German Herrlichkeitslied ("O That Will Be Glory for Me"), which I had asked the folks at my home church to sing in German for our American guests. She knew that Werner's change was real when he joined her and others on the way home in singing some of the choruses from our printed program. That night he refused to watch TV, as was his custom, and instead listened to the ensemble cassette that they had purchased. When friends stopped by

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Persevering Faith

Rodney O. Willis

Justin was just four and a half when he first saw Jesus face-to-face. His little face must have lit up the moment he woke up on Heaven's shore, for he felt no pain, perhaps for the first time in his life.

From birth Justin suffered with cancer in one eye, a brain tumor and no roof in his mouth. After about two months of feeding him by tube, the doctors were able to fix the roof of his mouth so he could eat properly. However, he struggled on with the cancer. He received chemotherapy treatments regularly, but nothing could send the cancer into remission. His eye finally had to be removed to prevent the cancer from spreading to the other eye. The brain tumor, undetected at first, caused perhaps the most grief. It stole from Justin everything, beginning first with his ability to comprehend, until it finally took his life.

God must have a special place in His heart for people like Justin, but He must have an even greater place in His

heart for people like Justin's parents. King David remarked in Psalm 37:25, "I have been young, and now am old; yet have I not seen the righteous forsaken, nor his seed begging bread." I'm sure no one could testify more to the truth of that verse than Justin's parents, who were dedicated missionaries to West Africa. They had faithfully ministered to other missionaries while learning the language. Their hearts broke when they realized God was bringing them back to the States. It seemed as if God were forsaking them, as if life were crashing down around them. But realizing that God doesn't forsake His own, they pressed on and trusted His grace.

Their faith has brought them another healthy baby boy and a chance to return to the mission field they love. It is that persevering, steadfast faith that must make God smile and pour out His richest blessings upon those of His children who trust Him through the darkest of trials.

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Exploring God's Word/from page 5

his own nation might be considered poor, they had provisions that heathen nations did not know about. So, by comparison, they were taken care of. Israel's law required the prosperous to give and lend to those less fortunate. They could not collect interest on these loans. In the Year of Jubilee, all debts were forgiven. Such policies made begging and poverty quite scarce. This situation contrasted with the heathen nations, whose evil ways brought suffering and poverty in a large scale. (Please read Deuteronomy chapter 30 carefully.)

Many of us have seen believers who had or have deep needs. Perhaps they do not sit in the streets and beg, but they are relatively in want, nevertheless. David was not saying that these people are unbelievers or that believers would never have to face hunger and lack materially. He observed, rather, that the God of Israel is a good God, ready and able to supply His children's needs. We as believers have confidence in God. He will take care of us. And even though someone like Lazarus fell upon great misfortune, he was incredibly rich because his ultimate destination was Heaven, the place of eternal bliss and riches. Ironside pointed out, "Had conditions been

right in Israel no son of Abraham would have been found in such a plight, but Lazarus was suffering because he was part of a nation that had drifted far from God. . . ."

Incidentally, I believe that the account of the rich man and Lazarus really happened. Some have speculated that it was merely a parable. However, Jesus didn't call it a parable. Abraham was a historical character. It is probable that there was a beggar named Lazarus and a rich man whose name Jesus did not give possibly to avoid offending loved ones and friends who heard the story recounted. (Although some people refer to the rich man as Dives, that wasn't his name. *Dives* is a Latin word simply meaning "rich man.") Parables do not generally give names of particular people, as did this account.

I might also point out that the name *Lazarus* means "helped of God." Certainly he was helped of God in the end and has for almost 2,000 years enjoyed complete contrast to the sufferings of this earth!

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later in the evening, he told them that he now trusted in Jesus. The next morning he played the cassette again. Frau Lorenz told us that when she left for work and they kissed good-bye, she could hardly wait until she would see him again that evening. How suddenly everything had changed! A few hours later she would bend over his lifeless remains, the right side of his body completely crushed in. But his spirit had preceded her to their Eternal Home.

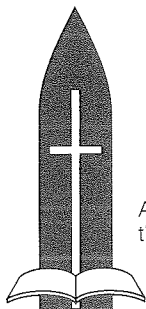
Then we had a short word of prayer together. Just before we left, Frau Lorenz begged Christa to play a number on the piano. I will always remember and cherish her parting words: "Welch ein grosser Gott! Wie wunderbar ist seine Vorsehung! Da

musste die jungen Leute als chor aus Amerika kommen und durch sie hat Gott unsere Gebete erhört und meinen Mann zum Glauben gebracht!" ("What a great God! How wonderful is His providence! These young people had to come as a choir from America, and through them God answered our prayers and brought my husband to faith.")

How marvelous indeed! God in His providence chose an ensemble from East Germany through the working of the Holy Spirit to become a citizen of Heaven. ■

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