



THINK ON THESE THINGS.....

Reading: Psalm 73:23-24

Nevertheless I am continually with you; you bold my right hand. You guide me with your counsel, and afterwards you will receive me with honour.

Reflection:

'Providential Accidents' is the title of the autobiography of Geza Vermes, who died in 2013. He's one of my favourite theologians. He was a world expert on The Dead Sea Scrolls, and a noted Historical Jesus scholar. His contribution to the world of Biblical Studies was immense. His life was packed full of both dreadful tragedy, great success, and much happiness and fulfilment.

Vermes was born in Hungary in 1924. His family was of Jewish origins but had embraced Christianity, hoping it would protect them from the rampant Hungarian anti-Semitism of those times. However, this didn't protect them when Germany took over Hungary in 1944. His parents were killed in The Holocaust. After the war he managed to escape from Russian occupied Hungary via Austria to the west, with the help of a smuggler and a train journey on which a Russian soldier failed to spot the inadequacy of his travel papers.

He studied in Belgium, where in 1950 he was ordained as a Catholic Priest. Later he moved to work in Paris. In 1957 he moved to England, relinquishing his clerical status, and took an academic position at the University of Newcastle-upon-Tyne, working in the field of Biblical Studies. He married in 1958. In 1965 he moved to Oxford University, specialising in Jewish Studies. A few years after that he formally self-identified as Jewish. However, he did also write that organised religion no longer suited him. His religion had become the 'still small voice' heard by Elijah (1Kings 19:12).

Reading his autobiography I am struck by the appropriateness of its title. For in both great and small ways, providential accidents seemed to help him get through the very bad times he faced, and to make progress in living his life in the better times, so that it was fulfilling and happy, and left a scholarly written legacy of books and articles that will benefit religious people, both Christian and Jewish, for many years.

It also struck me how providential accidents can be a good description for many of the developments in the lives of most of us. We are often in the right place at the right time. Sometimes decisions made in a random way or without as much thought as should have been given to them, turn out for the best. I believe we can see the band of God at work, quietly guiding us so as to be able to live our lives to their full potential.

Breath-Prayer for Today:

Almighty God, we pray that you will shine on our path so that we may walk in your light Lift from our hearts all anxiety and fear. Teach us to trust you both for that which we see and for that which is hidden from us. So always lead us in your way and keep us in your peace. Amen.

