

bogus authentication of miracles

A miracle may be seen as a message but the trouble is that nobody cares about what it means but what they say it means. The risk of miracles being all about interpretation is terrible.

A miracle is an event that is not naturally possible. That does not mean it is necessarily impossible. There could be a power greater than nature such as a god that can do it. A miracle is supernatural. Its really magic and superstition under a different name. If a power can instantly remove an incurable terminal disease, then it can guarantee bad luck for those who walk under ladders.

A miracle just for show is one thing if it is a real miracle. That thing is show. It is no good for religious or spiritual reasons. An event that you mistake for a miracle because of the lies of others or their errors is another subject. It is no better than a miracle that is just for show. It is like a man-made show.

If you are showing a miracle is real or a vision you need some unreal miracle to contrast it against. This is never done.

Studies investigating supernatural visions and apparitions never cover somebody who wrongly thinks they have visions. Thinks is a different matter from having them.

They say that you can have a real series of visions but be deceived in thinking the miracle visions are continuing. The idea is that your mind can make echoes of the original real visions by manipulating your imagination or perception. The memory of the real vision can intrude so that you can think it is happening again. This shows that there is no real way to tell a heavenly vision apart from a false or psychologically made one. It totally ruins the claim that Jesus appeared to establish clearly that he rose from the dead.

Most miracles do not definitely give a message. Apparitions of Mary are examples of miracles that do. But though the Church says it does, it is clear that a miracle healing in the Catholic Church does not actually say the Church is right or true. The evidence is that miracles are random or for show. To seek them or applaud them is to insult the children who are dying who could use a random or showy miracle. The witnesses are one thing but those who listen to them are taking the biggest risk of adoring what for all they know may be a random miracle. The seers and those who live by hearsay are two different problems.

The gospel of Matthew says that dead saints were raised the time Jesus died and appeared to many. Nobody knows if Matthew thought they just rose like Lazarus as mortal beings. If they rose the way Jesus did then they beat him to the punch. Where did they go? Did they go up to Heaven? The reference to appearing shows that Jesus was not the first to rise from the dead as in glorious resurrection to everlasting life. This totally ruins the Christian message. There is nothing to stop you saying Jesus never appeared but one of the other entities was mistaken for him or perhaps impersonated him. It fits how Jesus was not very recognisable at times when he appeared! The point is how here we have an interesting miracle and believers are assuming miracles to make sense of it. But the rule is you cannot assume miracles. You have to have a definite miracle claim - eg resurrection as in Lazarus or the Jesus type of resurrection for example. You need to avoid assuming by having evidence. If somebody tells Matthew that the miracle is not that those people rose but that people thought they did. There is nothing he can say to that. If he says anything he is guilty of bias and cherry-picking.

Religion likes to argue that if a miracle worker is caught cheating then we don't have to investigate any further. Most sceptics agree.

But there are allegations that fake mediums and miracle workers have not been faking all the time. There is supposed to be evidence that they did supernatural things when cheating was impossible - eg when the venue was checked out and there was nobody around who could have set up props.

Semi-sceptics disagree about when a person caught cheating may have been doing magic for real.

They recognise that in some cases that seem authentic cheating may have been behind it.

So they cannot really know exactly what events were magical or not. They think they know that some were but they cannot say they know which ones.

The conclusion is that people can only tell you in general that miracles happen but it is impossible to be specific about what events are miracles. Thus nobody has the right to tell you to believe event x is a miracle. Nobody can tell you to believe in

the resurrection of Jesus. And only a bully tells you to believe for your salvation is at stake if you don't. It is safe to assume that if you are pressured to believe that event x is a miracle that is a sign that it probably is not. Belief in a real miracle should not try to force or frighten.

The Church says that most miracle claims are suspect and only a few pass the tests for being truly supernatural. It says its narrow-minded to dismiss all miracles just because so many of the miracle stories are based on lies or errors. That is true but it is not the whole story. There are other considerations too.

Suppose a miracle happens. All you may be able to show is that it is unexplainable and that the testimony to this is reliable. You cannot prove or give adequate evidence that God did it. All you get is an extraordinary fact. You can only guess what did it. What if its an artificial intelligence that cannot be seen or heard just like God cannot be seen or heard? In fact, you would be entitled to make the best guess and that would be that its some kind of artificial intelligence. It is false that miracles would show us the existence of God or that Jesus is his supernatural messenger.

Apparitions accepted by the Catholic Church have told provable lies. They are evidence that the force behind miracles is not to be trusted. Plus the Church selects only the miracles that fit its doctrine as authentically divine which means that the Church is filtering and manipulating the evidence. You couldn't get worse dishonesty than that. The result is that if God tries to speak to the Church and contradict it the Church will not give him a hearing. No God would waste his time doing miracles in the Catholic Church and the miracles of that Church make it clear that their source is not God. The Church admits that miraculous visions can happen and not be verified by the Church for it says the Devil often sends visions, masquerading as Jesus or Mary. So when God lets miracles that are beyond verification happen he is allowing silly miracles.

Whenever a natural explanation for a seemingly supernatural event is available, it is to be preferred. Nobody disputes that. Atheists and religious people alike agree on it. Christians say that "doesn't entitle you to dismiss the possibility of miracles, because as soon as you have a natural explanation for one strange happening, along comes another example which cannot be explained." But just because we are ignorant of the explanation does not mean the explanation is supernatural. It may be a natural explanation that we don't have. Sometimes facts are lost or incomplete or distorted and we may never be able to know exactly what happened. Religious people are very biased. They become unfair in order to promote belief in miracles. And miracles if they happen serve to encourage their dishonesty.

And there are apparitions that cast Mary in a bad light such as Medjugorje where she criticises the bishop and causes trouble and tells lies and makes laughable statements. The Church assumes it is not her but what if it is? What if the nice visions are the fabricated ones?

Jesus and Mary were Jews. It has been remarked that the Virgin Mary and Jesus in apparitions always look like the ideal white Caucasian. Why? Because Christianity is anti-semitic though it was worse when the Lourdes and Fatima and Knock apparitions were reported. It is telling how the visions go along with such a vicious religious prejudice against the Jews who at the time were mocked at Catholic worship on Good Friday as perfidious Jews.

Consider the miracle of the Virgin appearing to St Bernadette at Lourdes in 1858. The Church claimed to authenticate that Mary appeared to her. It did not. What it authenticated (leave aside the question about whether the authenticating is of any validity) was that Bernadette was having trances that couldn't be explained by doctors and that a spring appeared and that healings took place. None of this proves that Bernadette really saw Mary. She might have lied or misunderstood. Or the vision might only have been pretending to be Mary. She may have went into a miraculous trance that affected her brain to make her imagine she saw the Virgin Mary. For the Church to say that it authenticated the apparitions of Mary at Lourdes is simply for it to lie. So here we have an extraordinary claim, that Mary appeared for which there is little evidence if you want to be generous. But the truth is there is NO evidence at all. So the miracles of Lourdes did nothing only support lies. We know that the stranger or more unlikely the claim, the evidence needs to be of a standard and strength to match the strangeness of the claim. The evidence needs to be in proportion to the level of unbelievableness of the claim. You don't need the same quality or quantity of evidence that Charlie met Annie at Loch Ness that you need to justify believing that Charlie saw the monster there. Lourdes and all the accepted Catholic apparitions deny this truth and so are evil and trying to drag us into superstition.

Miracles that few want to believe in are soon forgotten. If people want to believe, that is when the miracle gets attention. And the Church and the investigators may come along to check out the miracles if the attention is great enough and publicised enough. The more people want to believe or the more people who think they want to believe, the greater the chance of self-deception. Even the most honest of people sometimes want to fool themselves and be fooled. You can never even partly tell if a person is telling the truth about experiencing a miracle. All you can do is assume. You can't just assume a miracle report is true. You need evidence.

God wants us to listen to him not men but when it is men who decide if a miracle really came from him it is clear that they get the benefit and the power and they can filter the word of God. If men for example wanted to promulgate a false revelation that Muhammad was the real saviour they could cover up and get a dubious miracle authenticated to seem to verify that. This is as bad in effect then as listening to them and not God. Belief in miracles is just belief in the people who say they have seen and verified them and not in God just as belief in a document probably written by Napoleon is not the same as belief in Napoleon for you did not see Napoleon write it. Miracles imply then that you should be the slave of religious leaders and cranks and see God the way they want you to see him as if he does not matter and they do. Miracles destroy spirituality and though they might speak of God they oppose him. We agree with them that God should be opposed and his wishes trampled on like pearls before swine. The revealer is always more valuable than the revealed for you see the revealed through their eyes. To honour the invention is by implication to honour the inventor even more. When you worship God you are really worshipping them instead of God by proxy and they love it.

A miracle event is really a pile of events. When "one" happens, religious believers cherrypick what events or elements they regard as natural or non-miraculous and what ones they regard as supernatural. For example, if you go walking in an area where there are statues of people from the past. Say you report seeing a vision of a man dressed in old-fashioned clothes. People who endorse supernatural beliefs will decide that it is natural to get carried away by imagination and mistake a statue for a vision. If they believe you, and you say that the man was using a tablet they will conclude that you were indeed mistaken for there were no tablets when the man would have been alive. They dismiss the possibility that the man using the tablet and being a ghost are actually compatible. Perhaps he got a tablet supernaturally. If you see the man at a spot that was exorcised they may again decide the sighting was an illusion. They will not assume that the seeming success of the exorcism was a misperception. Acceptance of miracles is based on intellectual dishonesty and unwillingness to follow the facts.

If a sensible man reports a time warp where in 2014 he ended up in a pub in the 1940's he will not be believed if he reports things that do not fit the time-period. For example, say Madonna is blaring from the wireless. This is unfair for if you assume the supernatural you assume that anything is possible and lose the right to cherry pick what visions and miracles to believe and what not to believe.

There are many things we can prove. There are many things we cannot. We accept many things as true without absolute proof or the perfect evidence. But that does not mean we should say, "We don't have foolproof evidence for this miracle being real so let us believe anyway." It means you should not say it. The fact is that if absolute proof for something is unobtainable, that does not mean you have to make do with less. There are many things that you need strong evidence for and any less is no good. And if miracles are not among those things nothing is!

FINALLY

Miracles are a menace and those who promote them are up to mischief whether they know it or not. If a miracle report comes up then maybe something supernatural did it. We cannot pretend to know what. To reasonably confirm the report you need to corroborate :

- the integrity of the witnesses
- the miracle expressing God's love and wisdom - a random or showy miracle can claim to do just that so the expressing could be misleading
- the accuracy of the report
- the reliability of any message given by the miracle
- that it is a miracle not a natural law or anomaly that must be relegated to the unexplained box
- each miracle depends on other miracles, God must work to ensure the natural evidence points to the miracle as true for what use is Jesus rising if nobody can be sure? He may even in a world of lies about miracles have to grant miraculous reliability and sincerity to the witnesses.

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