

## COMMON GROUND: RELIGION AND THE SCEPTIC

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 a god that can do it. A miracle is a supernatural event. It's like God doing magic. A miracle is when God does magical things like raising Jesus from the dead.

Miracles are likely or unlikely. To say they are likely means its no big deal if one refuses to take one's cancer treatment in the belief God will take the cancer away. To say they are somewhere in between likely or unlikely also says it doesn't matter if you get the treatment or not. Believers and sceptics agree that miracles are unlikely but differ as to the degree of how unlikely they are.

All reasonable people agree that if a miracle is reported that it is more likely that the witness is mistaken or lying than that they are right. Even the Catholic Church takes that as the default position. But it argues that there is evidence that some of the witnesses were telling the truth accurately.

David Hume reasoned that miracles are so improbable that we need to go beyond a normal amount of evidence to verify them or make them believable. This is obviously correct. Most believing people even in the Catholic Church have a weak belief in some miracles. They do not agree with Hume fully but they agree to a large level.

Nobody agrees on exactly what was a miracle and what was not. Some Christians are suspicious of the resurrection of Jesus. People implicitly imply that testimony to a miracle is not enough and more is needed. Hume would have agreed.

Catholics would say that those who do not believe in those miracles are not convinced by them because they don't want to believe. This in a nutshell is the heart of the debate between science/paranormal debunkers and Roman Catholicism.

The sceptic is accused by religion of saying , "Miracles don't happen and no evidence will change my mind." But in fact, the sceptic only admits the truth - a miracle cannot be believed in unless you see it. It is the religious person who is unfair and biased and he agrees with the sceptic but refuses to see or admit it. Even the religious person refuses to believe in some miracle reports. The Catholic will be sceptical about pagan idols being able to heal those who pray to them.

Sceptics are accused of unfair bias against the supernatural. This overlooks the fact that sceptics do not claim they can explain every alleged miracle. And the Catholic Church itself is sceptical about the huge majority of miracle claims. Both recognise that what is inexplicable is not necessarily supernatural.

The atheist and the sceptic has the right to be offended by miracle claims and miracle stories for religion uses them to get prideful satisfaction in the thought, "We are so open to God's love that we believe". And indeed she will be if she has self-respect.

The Catholic Church knows that when a reported miracle happens, it has to check it out and eliminate all natural explanations and the possibility of trickery before it can say it is possibly a miracle. Both the sceptic and the Catholic can say, "I don't know - maybe it is a miracle." The Catholic can go too far and say, "It's a miracle." The sceptic is accused of being too narrow minded to say that. But in fact the Catholic is not entitled to say for definite that it is a miracle. It is the Catholic who is being narrow-minded.

The philosophers do not believe it makes sense to believe in miracles. Christians themselves agree with what the philosophers say up to a point. If witnesses of the highest calibre staid they saw a prince being turned into a frog by a witch the Church itself would agree that this great evidence is not enough and it couldn't have happened. The Church would say that absurd miracles don't happen no matter how much evidence there is in support of them. The absurdity of the miracle would be proof that it couldn't have happened.

The Church assumes that its own absurd miracles make sense and it laughs at everybody else's.

In other words, the Church is saying that the philosophers are right to be sceptical but we should believe in the miracles the Church believes in just because the Church says so. But that just leaves us guessing that miracles happened. The point of miracles is to take away the need for guessing.

Sceptics must outline the common ground with believers. It helps pave the way for them to eradicate the error that draws them to believe.

