

DO MIRACLES COMFORT OR DOES BELIEF IN MIRACLES COMFORT?

Miracles are events that seem to be against nature or the way natural law usually runs. In other words, they cannot be explained by nature. Examples are the Blessed Virgin Mary appearing to children, the unexplained cure of incurable illness, blood coming out of nowhere on Catholic communion wafers, the sun spinning at Fatima in Portugal in 1917 and most importantly Jesus Christ coming back to life after being dead nearly three days. It is thought that only God can do these things.

Miracles are said to be God showing his love by doing supernatural things.

In Catholic circles, if somebody is seriously ill and dying, the Catholics appear with relics and prayers to pray over them for their healing. Not just any relic or prayer may do but specified ones. There is no concern for giving the family false hope of a miracle. They act like they are trying to do magic to work a miracle. No matter what they say, that is the impression they give and the impression they want to make. It's disgusting.

Miracles and prayer go together. What is the use of God doing miracles if not to call us to pray? God will do what he does, which is supposedly the best, whether he is asked to or not. Praying then is not helping. Some say praying makes spiritual energy. If so, praying is putting bad energy into the world. It is about wanting people to feel helped when it does nothing and makes no difference. People fear opening themselves up to spiritual forces through the occult and religion that may be harmful or deceitful. Prayer is certainly at least implicitly trying to do that. Prayer would be vile and dangerous despite the peace and comfort that the deceiving powers may instil in the person who prays. This is a trick to get them to pray more and end up in a worse state.

People who fear the unknown or the future may read the gospel accounts of a God who intervened a lot in the world in the three years of Jesus' ministry. This comforts them though they think there is no such intervention today. But that does not matter. What matters to them is the evidence that God is in control despite appearances. So they would not trust God without the miracle stories and if there were no such stories. They would not be satisfied with a God who just guided nature to run its course and who did not intervene. This is not trust at all. It is trust with conditions. Would you say a husband who said, "Unless my wife wears blue I do not trust her" really trusts her? Religious believers bleat that critics of miracles attack and ruin their faith. That is a slander - the critics upset them for they show up how they are pretending to be happy. That offends them for it means they are hurting and encouraging others to participate in the deception.

Miracles are a mystery - they are supernatural so we cannot understand them. A miracle by definition cannot be understood. Religion says we cannot understand God's ways for the picture he sees is so complex so if he tried to explain the reasons to us we would never be able to take much in. So God might command that we engage in capital punishment for some reason we might not understand. We have to obey without understanding the justification. So the reasons for miracles are also a mystery. It is foolish to take comfort in the supernatural for you never know where you fit in the divine plan. Maybe God needs to put you out of existence or make you suffer forever for the sake of others so that the plan will work. Those who say they take comfort in miracle tales and signs merely take comfort in their own assumption/belief that God will make it all good for them. It is not the miracles that comfort them but their own attitude that God must look after them even if he should not. It is their own arrogance that comforts them. The miracles are useless as comfort. That is not what they are for by any stretch of the imagination. If a religion says they are for that then the religion is lying or mistaken.

Miracles should be rare. If a miracles are signs from God, then only one good and well-attested sign is necessary. God doing more signs would imply that God has a lack of confidence. People are comforted by miracles and that is strange for they imply that if there is a God then he is a bungler.

Miracles seem to do some good such as making people feel consoled. Actually, people make themselves feel good on the occasion of an alleged miracle. The miracle has nothing to do with it. They do it themselves therefore they can do without the miracle. A god doing supernatural wonders would not realise that. He would not be much of a god.

Jesus said that God is to be loved totally. Christians claim they put God first. Some when they see people in need of comfort focus on them not what God wants. You do not tell a cancer patient, "You suffer for a reason. I wouldn't want you to think that God is wrong in letting this happen to you." Yet you should if God really comes first. Proving God right and defending his ways comes before saying things to try and comfort the sufferer. Even miracles that seem to comfort are in fact indirectly opposing comfort.

People who have come through crippling depression may say they are not glad that they experienced depression but happy to have learned some lessons from it. But if they learned how good you can be when they suffer depression they did not

learn it from the depression. Depression by definition never teaches you anything. You learned it in spite of the illness. Evil never teaches you good or helps you. The good arises in spite of it. The Church needs the callous view that evil leads to good for God brings out out of it. Otherwise it ends up with no way to make the existence of evil fit the existence of a perfectly good God who has the power to stop all evil.

How could a healing be from Heaven when people take it as an encouragement to listen to and follow religion? Religious faith is bad. The first Stalin of the 21st Century, George Bush, the fictitious president of the United States, has confessed that his faith sanctioned his utterly depraved war against Iraq. Christians will say that it was his own self-will that was behind it not his faith. They allege that his faith was just an excuse. But the Bible itself records people who fought with divine approbation and support. There can be no doubt that he used his faith to make himself willing to do all that evil. If we are naturally selfish creatures then religious faith is selfish. Therefore we are fully entitled to blame his faith. Christianity killed the innocents of Iraq. Jesus takes the responsibility for Christianity so Jesus murdered them.

The Church would say that beliefs in miracles even if they are false are not completely foolish because they comfort people.

Miracles seem to be about people wanting assurance from God that he is there and caring for them. They could be letting their need for happiness and their experience of the benefits cloud their judgement. The nice miracle tales could be grounded in people's wish for fulfilment and deliverance from fear. But what about the fearful miracles such as the huge percentage of people who think they have been kidnapped by aliens or met demons? What has that to do with those who experience nice miracles? Some people like to believe something awful happened to them, it helps make them appreciate their life more.

And they may like the attention too. And if miracle experiences are really down to hallucinations, mistakes, imagination and other kinds of error such as self-deception then we can expect horror stories.

It is sometimes said that Catholics and other Christians who endured the stigmata would not have inflicted such agony on themselves so we can eliminate deliberate hoaxing. But people inflict the agony of self-starvation on themselves and not always for understandable reasons. Stigmatics nearly always have had a traumatic and horrific past. They are used to suffering. It could be that if they feel they wasted that suffering by not offering it to God or for the spread of the Christian faith among those who are drawn to religion by supernatural claims they may want to make amends for that by wanting the suffering of the stigmata. Therese Neumann had horrific wounds but nobody ever saw how they appeared. Thus nobody can prove they were not self-inflicted. Stigmatist Lukardis of Oberwimar (1276-1309) craved her stigmata when it was not present and was observed trying to force the holes in her hands to open with her fingers.

Miracles seem to heal and comfort people. But despite the good - assuming it is good, miracles are a bad thing overall. Belief in miracles has led to more harm than good. For everybody who is helped, there is ten who has been led into superstition and robbed of a lot of money by miracle mongers looking for donations. These miracle mongers range from fortune-tellers to the likes of US Televangelists. Even Jesus warned that fake Christs would come with great miracles and be able to lead even the elect astray. If God were all powerful, he would have things arranged so that belief in miracles would be good.

Whatever the cause of so-called miracles is, it is not God. Those who promote miracles have more concern for what they want to believe than in promoting beliefs that are generally wholesome and therapeutic. Miracles lead more to evil than good. The short-term benefits come at a long-term price.

What is the prime consideration: the comfort people may get from believing in miracles or whether the miracle is real or not? If God comes first then it is the miracle being real. In fact if we are to love God alone ultimately it is the only concern. Christian logic goes that since God is absolutely good he must be our only love for nothing else is as good or important as him.

If a miracle is about revealing love and giving consolation then the evidence is not important. You need not work hard at getting evidence to back up the miracle. But you might think its not very comforting to hear about miracles that there is insufficient evidence for. That would mean there is no evidence that the consolation is justified. We need evidence before we can accept it as consolation or find it consoling.

The comfort got from miracles probably evaporates as soon as the person forgets about religion. And it is a false comfort. The person needs to be challenged for her own good.

Better to face reality than to live in a dream. What does not kill you makes you stronger. The harder the truths you face the stronger you will be. Others will be inspired by that strength.