

## MIRACLES -

### People Believe in their Interpretation of Them and Not in them

A miracle is what is not naturally possible. It is a supernatural occurrence. It is paranormal.

Religion uses miracles as evidence for the truth of its claims.

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.

Crafty Pope John Paul II canonised Josemaria Escriva. A miracle was needed to show that Escriva really was a saint and with God in Heaven before he was canonised. Sister Concepcion Boullon was a Carmelite nun in Spain. She was allegedly miraculously cured of lipocalcinogranulomatosis which is believed to be incurable medically. She claimed she was suddenly cured one night in 1976. As nuns do, she prayed to different angels and saints. She claimed she had been praying to Escriva and attributed the cure to him! Despite the impossibility of proving that it was him, the Church simply guessed that he healed her. Then that cure was declared proof that he was a saint in Heaven! The only thing the miracle could prove is perhaps that God wants us to be that stupid.

David Hume said that we observe that nature works in a regular way. He said that the evidence against a miracle is always going to be stronger than the evidence for it. Dead people stay dead which is why we don't believe stories about people coming back from the dead. Theologians may say that the regularity of nature is not as fixed as we think and there could be exceptions. They add that we know what the exceptions are by examining the evidence. This forces Christians to exaggerate the force of the evidence given in the New Testament for the resurrection of Jesus. The evidence would need to be as good as the evidence that the dead stay dead and it isn't. We see the dead staying dead. We do not have equally good evidence that Jesus rose.

The problem with the view that nature is not as regular as we think is that it follows that miracles may not be supernatural at all but may be freaks of nature. Maybe genes programmed a person to have a vision of a major religious figure from the tradition such as the Virgin Mary? Thus they would be given a religious significance they may not have.

The claim that miracles are signs is just an interpretation that pretends miracles are evidence for God and religion. They could be evidence that God is stupid and needs to alter nature to correct his mistakes in which case they would prove he is too incompetent to deserve to be called a God. If they are signs they either show that God is almighty and all good and should be worshipped properly or they show that he is not a God at all but a fool. His trying to look professional would make him an untrustworthy braggart.

Cancerous tumours can disappear inexplicably and babies missing a lot of brain matter can be normal. Because these are not related to religion or spirituality and not to an unmistakable answer to prayer they are not invested with miraculous significance. If they are not miracles then the phenomena religion brags about is not miraculous either.

This suggests that what is medically inexplicable should not be pronounced a miracle for there is so much that we do not understand and science is humbled by the mysteries of the cosmos.

Religion has to confess that unknown natural forces can simulate miracles for it admits there are laws of nature yet to be discovered that will seem as miraculous to us as lightning did to cavemen. So what business has it attributing them to God or to the supernatural? It is like refusing to believe that water was spilled on your kitchen floor by your wife and that a ghost put it there.

The following seems plausible. "Strange natural laws would not do miracles that seem to have proceeded from some personal intelligence. They would be reckless and haphazard things like a person exploding for no reason or a daffodil growing in five minutes. Miracles usually do not look like the work of blind and fluke laws of nature so they must be lies

and hoaxes". How do you know that these things do not happen? That is the crunch! People would not report such oddities and any that do would be laughed at. Besides the universe is unbelievably large and we are so small that it could be that it is very rarely that we see them.

The natural laws which keep a computer in existence should silence those who say that nature wouldn't have the potential to simulate miracles, to simulate intelligence. A computer after all is made out of nature and it is because of natural law that it is able to do its job. For example, it can work with electricity.

Christians will retort that the computer is a miracle of God itself for God keeps it in existence and has made the laws that allow computers to be made and to exist. They will argue from this that I can't say that a miracle, creation, disproves miracles. But we should take it for granted that nature is there. We cannot take God for granted - evidence is needed. They are guilty of begging the question. They need to present the evidence for God and verify it before they start saying that we shouldn't simply assume that nature can be intelligent by luck.

The events designated as miracles would not be miraculous or supernatural but simply strange and natural. When nature can go haywire why can't it do so in such a way that miracles may mostly or totally seem to be the activity of something intelligent? It would only take one miracle to arrange that. And besides we all know that at least some of the accepted miracles were not real miracles which invites the question of how do we know they are real? We know that some of the convincing miracles - if there are such things - must be fake. We can never know that miracles come from something intelligent and especially when miracles are so rare and there will be ones that nobody mentions.

We must remember that when natural law enables us to carry out the perfect miracle hoax it is right to say natural law has done it. So why then can't it do it without us on its own?

Religion says that they do not know what unknown laws of nature might cause or do. But the religionists do not believe that these laws could make a woman dead for centuries appear to Bernadette at Lourdes and then work piles of healing miracles. They must be psychic then when they can confidently rule that out. Some say there is a huge difference between the miracles that Jesus has done and the telekinesis that has been - reportedly - observed in a laboratory for its effect is small. That is a matter of opinion as we shall soon see. If you can bend spoons with the power of your mind, you can change a few stem cells in you to start off the gradual creation of an immortal disease resistant body that will never age or die and do better than Jesus for everybody will be able to prove this miracle. Changing a few cells inside your body so that they will reproduce and eventually replace all the cells you have with anti-death and anti-aging ones is bound to be the easiest thing you could ever do with telekinetic ability so to admit that telekinesis exists at all is to admit that Jesus had no right to say his resurrection proved anything. He might have used a little telekinesis to ensure that the gospel stories of the resurrection would seem plausible (they are not but I am assuming for the purpose of argument that they are) when they would be written down.

Perhaps all strange things like visions of the Loch Ness monster and Uri Gellar apparently stopping Big Ben are symptoms of the wayward laws. It is when you consider all the strange claims in the world that you see that if natural law can do "miracles" it might have done all these things. The religious argument depends on the laws seeming to follow a pattern but when you consider all strange supernatural claims you see this pattern does not exist for the things reported are so different and strange. Even the lack of credibility of some claims does not mean that the claims are not true.

A religion unfairly bases its argument that it must be the true religion on miracles. It says its seemingly credible miracles show it is God's authorised religion which is not fair. It is unfair to say that the miracles of Jesus could not have been flukes of nature while ignoring all the other flukes in the world or when one has failed to do the impossible, investigate all the flukes thoroughly so that one has the right to say that about Jesus. Jesus did evil miracles when they lead to such evil.

Many people would not tell if they experienced a miracle so looking for patterns to give some light is no use. It is evil to say miracles are signs from God for that is dishonestly arguing that God exists because he does miracles and miracles happen because God exists. Circular reasoning is a chief trait in religion. Many miracles or strange events that were held to show that miracles had a cause in the hidden powers of the human mind have been reported and inadequately refuted or not refuted at all. These outnumber the claims of Catholics regarding miracles. For a believer to hold that miracles are signs after all that is worthless for instead of having an open mind they just pretend to know it all.

Also, there is the problem of determining what the alteration of nature was. For example, was the Catholic allegedly cured of cancer at Lourdes really cured there or did a fluke of natural law make cancer show up in the doctor's tests that was not

there at all? Perhaps the children at Fatima never saw a lady in white at all and the miracle of the spinning crowd that much of a crowd of 70,000 saw was the inexplicable freak of nature. Maybe the children of La Salette who saw Mary had a dream caused by a fluke of nature and never saw her at all. Again, this could be applied to every miracle or ghost story and shows the dishonesty of anybody who says, "This miracle proves what I or my religion says". They don't even have any business saying it is a miracle.

Religion sets up a doctrinal system and if the miracle fits that system it says the miracle is true. But if miracles are signs then there should be some standard and test outside that system so that the sign can be identified as a sign (page 454, The Encyclopaedia of Unbelief). You don't invent a system of information about somebody and then say that anything that fits it verifies it for that is a recipe for total anarchy.

Religion interprets the witnesses of miracles it wants to believe in as reliable people. What it should be doing is listing all the "reliable" miracle reports including UFO style miracles and fairy miracles and it will then be able to create a scientific picture about how many of those people must be lying though they seem to be reliable as people.

Why do some people who would make excellent honest witnesses for miracles not see them? Why do so many unfit people see them? Religion often answers that it is because God sees that doing a miracle to convince all people will not work.

Those who don't want to believe but who admit its not natural will say its aliens or something that is doing it. But it is not right to use religion to make accusations against people and to stir up mistrust against them.

Suppose some people see a miracle such as the Virgin Mary standing on top of a hill. Some will say they can't explain it but will not resort to saying its a definite miracle. Others will say it was a miracle hallucination. Others will say its really an apparition of Mary. Others will say its a trick by aliens. There is nothing wrong with people having different interpretations in itself. But to say, "Its a miracle from God who is working through it to make us holy and good believers" says there is. It implies that the other interpretation are just against God's plan whether they realise it or not. They refuse to respond to divine love. This causes a bias and scares people into adopting the religious line. It makes us sceptical of them when they are under pressure. The bottom line is that its wrong to blacken people over their interpretation of a miracle. It is bad to do that in any field but worse if you do it for the sake of a religion you claim is about making people holy and good.

Even if a miracle tale is not a lie or a mistake but is true, it does not stop witnesses and their supporters telling lies about the meaning of the miracle. What if Bernadette saw Satan instead of the Virgin Mary and lied about it being Mary? What if a miracle cure of cancer that leads people to think God is trying to say he wants all people in the Catholic Church really happened but the witnesses are lying that it had anything to do with religion? There is intense pressure as well to say that a miracle means something. If you say it just happened people won't be interested.

Belief in miracles being signs is just an interpretation. It is imagining that they are evidence. To present an interpretation of events as the fact is a bad and harmful habit.

We should not believe in miracles. When we hear a miracle report we should give the preference to assuming what is non-miraculous or assuming that there must be some natural explanation for the miracle. Even positing aliens with their super-science would do! Miracles, though interesting, are abhorrent for they serve religious rulers not God. It is not God but human interpretations of him and assumptions about him that get the service offered by religion. In other words, it is the men who are being served. The money you pay religion doesn't do God any good. It doesn't go into God's bank account.

Miracles cannot be signs from God when all we can do is assume that they are signs but we cannot use them as the basis of faith. It is your interpretation of the why and which and how and what you embrace, not miracles.

Further Reading ~

A Christian Faith for Today, W Montgomery Watt, Routledge, London, 2002

Answers to Tough Questions, Josh McDowell and Don Stewart, Scripture Press, Bucks, 1980

Apparitions, Healings and Weeping Madonnas, Lisa J Schwebel, Paulist Press, New York, 2004

A Summary of Christian Doctrine, Louis Berkhof, The Banner of Truth Trust, London, 1971

Catechism of the Catholic Church, Veritas, Dublin, 1995

Catholicism and Fundamentalism, Karl Keating, Ignatius Press, San Francisco, 1988

Enchiridion Symbolorum Et Definitionum, Heinrich Joseph Denzinger, Edited by A Schonmetzer, Barcelona, 1963

Looking for a Miracle, Joe Nickell, Prometheus Books, New York, 1993

Miracles, Rev Ronald A Knox, Catholic Truth Society, London, 1937

Miracles in Dispute, Ernst and Marie-Luise Keller, SCM Press Ltd, London, 1969  
Lourdes, Antonio Bernardo, A. Doucet Publications, Lourdes, 1987  
Medjugorje, David Baldwin, Catholic Truth Society, London, 2002  
Miraculous Divine Healing, Connie W Adams, Guardian of Truth Publications, KY, undated  
New Catholic Encyclopaedia, The Catholic University of America and the McGraw-Hill Book Company, Inc, Washington, District of Columbia, 1967  
Raised From the Dead, Father Albert J Hebert SM, TAN, Illinois 1986  
Science and the Paranormal, Edited by George O Abell and Barry Singer, Junction Books, London, 1981  
The Demon-Haunted World, Carl Sagan, Headline, London, 1997  
The Book of Miracles, Stuart Gordon, Headline, London, 1996  
The Case for Faith, Lee Strobel, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 2000  
The Encyclopaedia of Unbelief Volume 1, Gordon Stein, Editor, Prometheus Books, New York, 1985  
The Hidden Power, Brian Inglis, Jonathan Cape, London, 1986  
The Sceptical Occultist, Terry White, Century, London, 1994  
The Stigmata and Modern Science, Rev Charles Carty, TAN, Illinois, 1974  
Twenty Questions About Medjugorje, Kevin Orlin Johnson, Ph.D. Pangaeus Press, Dallas, 1999  
Why People Believe Weird Things, Michael Shermer, Freeman, New York, 1997

## THE WEB

The Problem of Competing Claims by Richard Carrier  
[www.infidels.org/library/modern/richard\\_carrier/indef/4c.html](http://www.infidels.org/library/modern/richard_carrier/indef/4c.html)