

Does the Context of a Miracle Determine if it is really a miracle or not?

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.

Some say that miracles are not proofs that God exists but merely evidences or indications. They are reputedly signs of his providential love.

For miracles to take that role, they must be God's way of trying to teach us something. That is where the notion that a supernatural event must have a religious context to be counted as a miracle comes in.

The context then must be far more important than the miracle. So if it is that important what does God need to do the miracle for?

The trouble is that you need to see the context, God must make it clear enough, Or you need to be told the context by God. You cannot just assume. You need a bit more than just thinking, "Maybe God would work in this situation. He might do x or y but not z." Michael Licona said, "The stronger the context is charged in this direction, the stronger the evidence becomes that we have a miracle on our hands."

Believers claim that the evidence for God and his indicator of what the true religion is comes from the factors surrounding the miracle, its context. So it is not the miracle itself. It's the context. So if a statue of Abraham Lincoln starts bleeding supernaturally it is evidence for nothing. If a statue of Mary starts bleeding supernaturally it is a miracle showing that Mary should be honoured as the mother of God. Is this not rather arbitrary and unfair and irrational? It is like saying that if the sun eclipses in the twentieth century it is a sign from God and if it eclipses in the twenty-first it is not a sign from anybody. If miracles are so useless, reporting them or teaching they have happened is superstition not godliness. Anybody that doesn't want to provide justification for deceitfulness would say nothing.

William Lane Craig in *The Case for Faith* has the nerve to say that a miracle must take place in a religious context to be a miracle. Otherwise if the Queen of England died and rose again without a religious context it wouldn't be a miracle but just an anomaly (page 91). If this happened it would show that violations of natural law that God had nothing to do with happen. If we can't trust nature then how can we trust that miracles are exceptions to natural law for you would need a strong faith in natural law before you could come to such a judgement or determine if a miracle has happened?

It makes no sense to say that the queen rising is not a miracle. Of course it is – its still a suspension or changing of natural law. Why should her rising be an anomaly and the rising of Jesus be a miracle just because the latter took place in a religious context? What if her rising was better attested and even more astounding than Jesus'?

Craig would probably believe that events on a par with the queen rising do happen. He might think of alien abductions and apparitions of monsters at Loch Ness. Even if such events didn't occur and he believed that, in order to believe that miracles were signs, he would have to necessarily hold that miracle like events outside the religious context were not miracles but strange events or anomalies. So belief in miracles from God then requires you to have this stupid attitude towards these strange events or anomalies should they occur. That means that belief in miracles is itself stupid and bigoted. It is bigoted because it is saying, "I will believe in events that seem to contravene nature that only God or a supernatural power can do called miracles only if they happen in a religious context, even if such events take place outside that context." It is also grossly dishonest. It means, "I only regard events as miracles if they suit my prejudices". That is the kind of people we trust if we believe in their reports about miracles!

Do you want to believe that Jesus rose from the dead miraculously? Then have you checked how many unnatural events like that happen? If odd events happen often then why would you be so sure that the rising of Jesus means anything?

What if Jesus rose and it was not a miracle but an anomaly and then he set about manufacturing a context so that he was able to turn the anomaly into a fake miracle? So the supernatural being real does not mean any event is really a miracle if

you use the definition of individuals like Craig.

If a miracle is a supernatural event with a religious context then what if the event was random and happened to fit into a religious context? What if the context was unintended? If God had to raise Jesus in a religious context it only means that God had to do it not that God intended the context. If wonders happen often enough many of them will slot into a religious context just by chance. And if a power is tampering with nature randomly you cannot trust the resurrection of Jesus for it might be that unreliable dabbler up to its old tricks again.

And if the religious context is needed then what religious context? Catholic, Protestant, Mormon or Islamic? The religious context doctrine really means something like this, "I will only accept miracles as signs from God should they fit the religious context I like. If I am a Protestant I will believe in the miracles reported by my Church and if the Catholic Church produces miracles even better one I am going to pay no heed to them and refuse to believe in them." Jesus taught his miracles were signs and disparaged everybody else's miracles as nonsense. By introducing belief in miracles into his cult, Jesus Christ quenched genuine charity. Charity and miracles are incompatible. If you were fair and cared about the truth you would not be adopting only the miracles that fitted what you wanted to believe. It is totally disrespectful towards people of other faiths and shows what you really think of them deep down.

All miracle claims could be understood as being about indicating that there is something paranormal there and nothing more. If miracles happen in pagan and Christian and non-religious contexts it could be that they are a message that these contexts do not matter and are not the point.

A miracle tale you hear from people you know though it is hearsay is not as much hearsay as an account from two thousand years ago. The context thing is too easily manipulated in principle and in practice. It is really a charter for religious manipulation.

Some miracle tales do not really have that spiritual or religious of a context and so believers have to stretch the truth and tell lies to sort that out. For example, a sick person may pray to several saints or holy people say John Paul II before his canonisation. The Church will say that if the person is healed miraculously it is a sign that John Paul is in Heaven and should be proclaimed a saint. But how could it be when the person prayed to others besides him and when the Church teaches that if you mistake somebody for a saint and they are not and you ask them to pray for you then Jesus will delegate the praying to a real saint? And what if the praying the person does is not what cured him but the prayers of others for him? A lot of lies have to be told to make it look like the cure took place in response to a prayer to the pope.

And what about good spiritual and religious contexts in which no miracle happens? Why are priests who are shot dead by Islamists not rising from the dead to tell them that their religion of violence is sinful? Why not say that Islamists who are clearly not brainwashed and who live a normal life and then start butchering people of a different religion have been turned that way by a miracle? Where do you draw the line?

Is it the case that a supernatural wonder without a religious context should be believed more quickly than one with one? Yes. It makes no sense to say that a supernatural event with a context matters more than a merely supernatural event. It is the supernaturalism of the event that gives the context significance so supernatural events are important in themselves.

The context theory is based on the notion that there are contexts in which we might expect God to intervene with a miracle. But is it not cruel to take a dying person and put them in a context where God might do something? Are you going to haul them from their deathbed and into the chapel or to the healer? Are you going to give them false hope by making the circumstances okay for a possible intervention? If you wouldn't do that, that does not matter. In principle you are still saying it could be done and that is okay.

A miracle must take place in a religious and faith context if it is to inspire us and communicate God's truth. But the argument presupposes you know when to expect a miracle. A context is too easily made. What if I say, "Okay Venus, somebody will send me flowers unexpectedly in the next seven days if you are truly divine"? Making a context for people to get cured by God when they will not is cruel.

The context argument leads to cherry-picking truth and to outright and cruel lies.

If believers are happy with that state of affairs do they really care about people? Are they about defending their religious prejudices in the name of faith? Aren't they the ones who say that faith is not prejudices? And they accuse atheists of being prejudiced against miracles!

Miracles and belief in them leads to the context argument so in the big picture they are nothing to celebrate. They are not harmless.

