

BOOK CRITIQUE: CS LEWIS' MIRACLES

CS Lewis is probably the most popular Christian writer of all time.

He wrote a book trying to express how it makes sense to believe in the Christian miracles. As the resurrection of Jesus is the most important one in the Christian faith and essential to the faith it is no wonder.

The main problem is how you can say you trust nature to work the way it does and then say that a miracle happens. If ducks don't fly to the moon then how does that allow for a miracle where a duck does fly to the moon?

CS Lewis said that when God does a miracle that "the laws at once take it over. Nature is ready." For example, if a tumour vanishes the laws of nature will carry on as if there had been no tumor at all.

Religion says, "A miracle is a temporary intrusion." Is that really much help for what if Mary was at Lourdes in 1858 and kept appearing there every day since? Maybe she never left! She never said she did. Maybe nobody sees her but she is still there?

Temporary should mean temporary but with the vast majority of accounts there is very little of anything temporary! Why does religion not prioritise the briefest and strongest miracles for investigation and celebration and faith? Surely the brief transfiguration where Jesus appeared with Moses and Elijah then surpasses his resurrection which meant a pile of miracles among which they count the empty tomb and Jesus appearing for 40 days and being more present with his Church now than ever though he cannot be seen? Isn't he supposed to be still alive? Each minute he is alive is a new miracle.

Suppose we need the miracle to be temporary. But how do you know that it is? The idea is nature goes on and something intervenes and then nature goes on again on its natural course. This assumes that just because what happens after looks like normality it actually is. That is not clear. For example, if we go back to Jesus who has supposedly risen from the dead just goes to work and on holiday that is still not normal. Each normal act is not normal for he should not be alive to do them.

IF MIRACLES ARE IMPOSSIBLE THEN IT IS BECAUSE LAWS OF NATURE ARE DEFINED AS FIXED. BUT ARE THEY?

QUOTE: Three conceptions of the 'Laws' of Nature have been held.

(1) That they are mere brute facts, known only by observation, with no discoverable rhyme or reason about them. We know that Nature behaves thus and thus; we do not know why she does and can see no reason why she should not do the opposite.

(2) That they are applications of the law of averages. The foundations of Nature are in the random and lawless. But the number of units we are dealing with are so enormous that the behaviour of these crowds (like the behaviour of very large masses of men) can be calculated with practical accuracy. What we call 'impossible events' are events so overwhelmingly improbable—by actuarial standards—that we do not need to take them into account.

(3) That the fundamental laws of Physics are really what we call 'necessary truths' like the truths of mathematics—in other words, that if we clearly understand what we are saying we shall see that the opposite would be meaningless nonsense. Thus it is a 'law' that when one billiard ball shoves another the amount of momentum lost by the first ball must exactly equal the amount gained by the second. People who hold that the laws of Nature are necessary truths would say that all we have done is to split up the single events into two halves (adventures of ball A, and adventures of ball B) and then discover that 'the two sides of the account balance'. When we understand this we see that of course they must balance.

The fundamental laws are in the long run merely statements that every event is itself and not some different event.

It will at once be clear that the first of these three theories gives no assurance against Miracles—indeed no assurance that, even apart from Miracles, the ‘laws’ which we have hitherto observed will be obeyed tomorrow. If we have no notion why a thing happens, then of course we know no reason why it should not be otherwise...

COMMENT: The logic of (1) is odd. He says if nature is brute fact then it may change. But then it may not. Why not assume the brute fact aspect is why nature is fixed? And if nature can fake miracles it means we can see Jesus being raised from the dead while in fact he is still dead.

It is true we have no notion why things are the way they are but it does not follow we don't have some idea. Some idea is enough otherwise we end up taking neither nature or miracle seriously. Lewis is contemplating running nature down for the sake of finding a gap that allows him to accept the possibility of miracles.

(2) turns a miracle into a renegade natural law - its natural law but a blip one.

(3) is good - there is nothing wrong with assuming it. A miracle cannot be evidence for God even if there is evidence that the miracle has happened when you don't have to accept the miracle as evidence. Evidence that is there but which you may deny is evidence is not evidence. We have the right to say we do not have enough evidence for something no matter what it is and demand more. Even evidence then is not necessarily enough to establish a miracle has happened. It comes back to letting others tell us what God has done and thus making idols of them! Whoever tells me all about Ann is not leading me to Ann but to what they think about her.

If nature lets man, your conjurer, do good fake miracles why can't it do it itself? It would be better then for it is something bigger than us doing it.

Evidence or not, you only accept miracles as plausible or true if you have already made up your mind. Religion lies that it gives evidence a role. The evidence it presents is mere decoration and about hiding how insane the religion is.

QUOTE: Most stories about miraculous events are probably false: if it comes to that, most stories about natural events are false. Lies, exaggerations, misunderstandings and hearsay make up perhaps more than half of all that is said and written in the world. We must therefore find a criterion whereby to judge any particular story of the miraculous. In one sense, of course, our criterion is plain. Those stories are to be accepted for which the historical evidence is sufficiently good. But then, as we saw at the outset, the answer to the question, ‘How much evidence should we require for this story?’ depends on our answer to the question, ‘How far is this story intrinsically probable?’ We must therefore find a criterion of probability.

COMMENT: If a claim is remarkably unusual and hard to believe then we need evidence. Many non-paranormal and non-supernatural claims are hard to believe. The standard and quality of evidence has to be very high. We need to judge paranormal and miracle events as harder to believe. If we cannot give as good evidence what we could give if the event were a claimed natural one then there is something badly amiss. Even if we need more than that it looks bad if we don't even have that!

It could be hard to believe that something is not a miracle when it is and hard to believe that something is a miracle when it is not. Here are the reasons why a miracle despite being an outrageous claim needs more support than an outrageous claim:

#its a different claim.

#its about a claim that there is something that might overthrow nature

#the need to protect people from religious fraud and error which have always been very rife

His logic is that history and evidence can say that something supernatural seems to have happened just like it can say something really natural but odd seems to have happened. He would say, "An event cannot be dismissed just

because it is supernatural. Look at the evidence." But is he saying we see events as supernatural and dismiss them on that basis? That is accusing sceptics of being closet believers. The evidence is the reason why sceptics reject miracles. There are always holes in it. It is about the evidence not us or what we want to think.

The problem for many is not that the supernatural cannot invade or work in this world but that most claims about its work are dubious and outright lies. Liars can be caught out years after. They can be pious liars. Every liar is a trustworthy person up until they tell a lie so don't reason, "It cannot be that Anne would lie." Most liars are once off liars. It is easy to be a truthful person if you make do with one big whopper of a lie.

The worst lie is the one that is the truth with a little distortion. It is the worst because it hangs around and most of what we believe comes from such lies and there is no hope of refuting them.

JP Holding denies that the Bible God absolutely bans lying but only bans false legal testimony. If that is true and it seems it is not then how can we be sure that when a miracle happens that God himself is not faking it? He would be better than man at it! Why would he do a supernatural wonder when he can do a magical trick?

Natural for religion means one side of a coin – the other side being supernatural. So for religion it cannot think of natural without thinking the supernatural is as real. The naturalist does not have this coin. For the natural it is just natural.

CS Lewis assumes that when God set up natural law it is not rigid. But what if natural law is a promise? For example, what if God uses seeds to give you trees as part of saying, "I promise you can use these seeds if you want trees." Lewis does not think of natural law as promise for he wants to make room for miracles. Nature is a book of God if there is a God. A truthful God will express a promise in the form of law. He can opt out but not a lot. He would need to be clear on that. What happens is religion sees a possible miracle that suits its agenda and it jumps in to say its real. But God never said it is real. He would need to predict a miracle and then do it. That has never happened. Jesus' prophecies of his resurrection from the dead do not count as they were written down after the alleged fulfilment.

Miracles are always in the past so only historians not philosophers or theologians have the right to check out the reports and state if they think something miraculous happened. That is not what happens in religion at all. The theologian makes up his mind and then steals the historian's work. And you won't be told about the historian who says it nonsense or that the evidence has gaps which means it does not really or definitely point to a miracle. Do historians just look at writers in the past and take them at their word until they find out different? Yes. What if there is a miracle in the records? They will suspend judgement on it simply because there are cases where the evidence for a miracle is refuted by other witnesses as evidence.

WHY C S LEWIS ONLY IMAGINED HE BELIEVED IN MIRACLES

CS Lewis is so popular among Christians and is the best authority for seeing what the religion suggests and teaches. He wrote: Whenever a very badly brought up boy is introduced into a decent family. They rightly remind themselves that it is 'not his own fault' that he is a bully, a coward, a tale-bearer and a liar. But none the less, however it came there, his present character is detestable. They not only hate it, but ought to hate it. They cannot love him for what he is, they can only try to turn him into what he is not. In the meantime, though the boy is most unfortunate in having been so brought up, you cannot quite call his character a 'misfortune' as if he were one thing and his character another. It is he—he himself—who bullies and sneaks and likes doing it. And if he begins to mend he will inevitably feel shame and guilt at what he is just beginning to cease to be.

COMMENT: Love the sinner and hate the sin is important to Christians for it is core Christian teaching that no matter what you do you will be doing something to offend God. The religion says we are all sinners and God loves us. That is just what love the sinner and hate the sin describes.

The religion goes as far as to say that the righteous person has no right to condemn adulterers etc. Condemn is best understood as fall out with. The religion says it judges and condemns actions not persons. It is a form of abuse for anybody to make you about what you do.

God is about love the sinner and hate the sin and so God makes no sense. No miracle then can prove that an

impossible God exists. Love the sinner and hate the sin is self-refuting.

Notice how Lewis lets it slip that the person is indeed hateful?

CONCLUSION

Lewis is not telling the whole truth in his examination of what natural law implies and means. The whole truth militates against affording any credibility to the miracles of religion. He is right that miracles need to be probable but in a world full of lying miracles and magical claims surely a real miracle will tell us how to assess? We are left to work that out for ourselves. We have a theory that a miracle happened, but the miracle itself then must be a theory or trying to be one. It is a self-declared theory. But a theory that does not give you the information you need that might falsify it is not a theory at all but a manipulative doctrine. When Lewis gives us the thinking behind belief in miracles and its full of dodges and lies what does that say about the religious investigators who say miracles have happened? They all fall together.