

MIRACLES - EVIDENCE OR TESTIMONY ENOUGH?

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

Miracles are acts contrary to the usual workings of natural law or acts according to some definitions that are natural but beyond our understanding of nature. In other words, an event like blood coming from the eyes of a statue without trickery would be a miracle or a statue coming to life.

The Church says God is all-powerful and he does miracles so that we might learn his message directly or indirectly from them. They are for teaching the truth and promoting it.

So a miracle is important because it is supernatural and also because of the divine message. It is obvious that no miracle should be accepted lightly. Miracle reporters who have not been cross-examined have no right to invite you to believe their tales.

Sceptics who say that nothing is good enough to show that miracles are believable are saying,

1 Miracles are so unlikely that no testimony for them will suffice

2 Miracles are so unlikely that no evidence for them will suffice

Some of those sceptics may accept one or the other. The rest embrace both.

A true sceptic says not that nothing is good enough to show a miracle happened but that under examination there HAS been no evidence or testimony good enough to persuade a real miracle happened. This sceptic is only a messenger of the evidence.

Testimony is not as good as evidence. Testimony can be unwittingly distorted. Evidence lets the investigator look at the problem himself or herself. There is more hope of being right. Hard evidence for something is always better than somebody testifying to it.

If a person has had a lot of experience with "reliable" people's testimonies being too undependable, that person is entitled to reject miracle stories in favour of hard evidence.

Some sceptics may say,

Miracles are so unlikely that no testimony or evidence for them may tell us one way or the other if they are real miracles.

It follows then that the testimony must come from an exceptionally and (as humanly possible) provably reliable person. Even if it is not enough you still need a witness of incredible calibre. It follows that you can still say the evidence is excellent even if it is not enough. So you need such evidence. That you need good grounds to believe a miracle report is true but even if you do not have enough for belief you still need a high standard.

So whether open to miracles or not, a decent standard of evidence and testimony for miracles is required by sceptics. Evidence can be exceptionally good and still fall short of establishing that a miracle has happened. Being closed to believing in miracles or being open does not stop you seeing the evidence is good. But sadly it never is.

It is said that it is vulgar to insist on this strictly good testimony and evidence just because a person testifies. But it is not about judging the person but the miracle. The Christians will not believe a reliable person who gets a revelation that all who hear him need to commit suicide so that they will rise again immortal in a few hours. They agree with unbelievers more than they like to admit.

Religion says evidence can be wrong and mislead. If evidence points to an absurd miracle being true - eg a witch turning a prince into a frog - the religion says the miracle is false. If there is hard evidence or testimony, then the testimony will make the weakest case. An absurd miracle accepted because of testimony is far worse and far crazier than one accepted because of hard evidence.

All religious apologetics, or evidences for the faith, flout these rules of sound thinking.

* What the strongest evidence says must be accepted no matter what the weaker evidence says. Hard evidence that a miracle has not happened overrides even a tonne of excellent testimonies that it has happened. In theory that can happen. Testimonies are often in conflict with hard evidence.

*Feeling that something is true is not evidence that it is true at all.

* Supernatural or paranormal claims require really good evidence. We look for exceptionally good evidence or should for some odd natural events so we should look for it for supernatural events. In fact we should have a tougher standard even if it is only a bit. The evidence for a murder conviction when the murderer seems to be too good to have been the killer has to be thorough and watertight just because the accused is so wonderful. The better the accused seems to be the bigger the risk of accusing her or him in the wrong. So the evidence for a person having true visions from Heaven or coming back from the dead has to be tougher for it is easier for a nice person to commit murder than for one to have real supernatural visions or rise from the dead. The natural interpretation comes first for what is natural is commoner.

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