

## *Be reluctant to believe*

### *QUICK ANALYSIS*

If somebody is said to rise from the dead that kind of claim asks for testing. If it orders you to believe it needs testing even more for why is it ordering you as if it wants to force you and has something to hide? It is not a claim then but a dogma. Its propaganda. So we should refuse to believe unless we have good tests. If you believe somebody who says they have done the testing you are in a sense testing them or accessing that they are telling the truth and have done a good job. The question is, is your testing enough? It is not. You need more than a mere feeling of trust. Refuse to believe until there is testing and while testing don't believe too easily. A healthy reluctance is in order.

If you hear a miracle report, Hume says believe it if it would be a bigger miracle for the witnesses to be lying or wrong. It is like you have to grudge belief in miracles and choose the tamest miracle explanation you can think of. Religion says the same thing as there is so much pious fraud about and a miracle will happen rarely for God wishes to stress how important it is to give a message. Too many miracles end up like too much mail in the post.

Why though would you choose to do what Hume says?

Because:

Miracles are somehow a harmful belief in different ways.

Miracles are a threat to our thinking processes. That alone is one way to be harmful.

Miracles violate the value of evidence. That alone is one way to be harmful.

Miracles are telling us these things if they happen.

Notice how Hume's advice has the miracle of faith in people put before the miracle they speak of such as Jesus rising from the dead. He is not rejecting miracle testimony for miracles from prejudice but is trying to give testimony its proper value.

Miracles are not to be rejoiced in or looked for but to be tolerated only as a necessary evil. They are a help to deal with the problem of working out religious truth. Religion then should be a small affair and crowds at miracle sites should be small. The miracle claims about the Catholic Mass should ALMOST put you off the religion.

### *ANALYSIS*

A miracle claim is a very serious claim. Some say that a miracle is so extraordinary you need extraordinary evidence to verify it. That is fine but they need to be careful with the expression extraordinary evidence. It is best stated that it needs to be as good as the evidence to put somebody away for life in jail. You want to avoid the notion that unbelievers want too much evidence.

Miracles are so serious and strange that they must be believed only as a last resort because the evidence pressures you to believe. So says the Roman Church. Yet this is the Church that leaves the bishop not the evidence or the investigation to decide if a miracle happened! Oh the hypocrisy! Anyway, back to the last resort point. It implies that miracle claims are bad at least until they are verified. We must be reluctant to believe in them. Miracles then must be evil. They invite people to evil. In that case, all the verifying in the world isn't going to make them good or entitle anybody to say they come from a good God.

*The purpose comes first but a miracle may falsely look purposeful*

The miracle cannot be more important than the purpose God does it for. A miracle by definition is a non-random that is purposeful event. But to prove it is really non-random means you have to have the same knowledge of the universe as a God would have. Belief in miracles is the fruit of arrogance. And sceptics who say with or without looking at the evidence that miracles just don't happen are accused of arrogance! If they should be they are not as bad as the believers!

*Look for extraordinary evidence anyway*

Christians say that those who argue that extraordinary evidence is needed for religious claims are indicating that they will

not consider evidence unless it is extraordinary. That is a straw man. The Christian wants to accuse sceptics and those who need evidence of being biased against Christianity and thus unreliable. The only way to see if evidence is good enough or extraordinary enough is to look at it! Extraordinary evidence is needed for extraordinary claims calls you to look at it and assess it. You cannot know if evidence is too ordinary unless you look.

Christians who tell you not to look for big evidence for their big claims about Jesus have an ulterior motive for saying that. What is wrong with looking even if it is not required?

And there is plenty wrong with not looking when it is required!

The ideal is to get all the evidence you can for anything. If the evidence is not much good to for thing it will be for something else.

### *Religion Caricatures the Skeptical Position*

The religious say we don't give miracles a chance. We say miracles are impossible or there can never be enough evidence for them or both. They say we reject miracles before we even take a look at the evidence for them. If the clock sits on the mantelpiece all day and levitates for one minute we are entitled to believe that this didn't happen if we didn't see it. Miracles do away with evidence and make life impractical. Imagine you believe in miracles. If you find the clock has split John's head open and left him dead during a levitation you cannot blame Sarah even if she was in the room at the time. You would never know if she did it or not. Miracle reports are implicitly evil. Some are blatantly evil.

It is thought that those who disbelieve miracle reports and say that exceptionally good evidence is needed for extraordinary claims are really saying, "An extraordinary claim like a miracle is one that we are already convinced isn't true or cannot be true". Not all of us are really saying that. What we are saying is, "If religion cannot provide extraordinary evidence for miracles, we will not say the miracle is false. It could still have been a real miracle. What we believe is that without the evidence we are not entitled or obligated to believe the miracle happened. But extraordinary claims do need to be justified by extraordinary evidence." We might have other reasons for holding that miracles are impossible but we cannot use the reasoning they attribute to us to declare them impossible.

It is thought that those who disbelieve miracle reports and say that extraordinary evidence is needed for extraordinary claims are also really saying, "Extraordinary evidence is evidence we know you cannot produce." The correct attitude is that, "If you can produce extraordinary evidence then I will believe in the miracle it proves." And, "You may have extraordinary evidence and that entitles you to believe but it doesn't obligate me to believe unless I see it too." That is accusing sceptics and investigators of being dishonest unless they believe in miracles. It is telling people to be biased in favour of accepting the miracle. The religious are insinuating that all who demand adequate evidence are trying to demand too much evidence.

### *Contradiction?*

"How can you say you need really good evidence for a miracle when you say evidence is no good for supporting a miracle?"

The answer is that the miracle demands good evidence and you demand it because the miracle does. And yet it cannot get it. There is no contradiction.

### *Conclusion*

The way religion encourages people to believe in hugely magical stuff without caring for evidence is actually anti-religious and it is manipulative. A good religion wants sensible and solid believers. Be reluctant to believe. This is not the same as saying, "I will not believe." It is saying, "I am open to believing but this material needs investigating". Belief in miracles opens the door to nastiness against unbelievers which is another reason to be reluctant to believe.