

Testimony for a Miracle - Is it enough?

A miracle is what is not naturally possible. It is a supernatural occurrence. It is paranormal. It's an act of God. There is no hard evidence. Witnesses tell us that that they saw something unexplained and that it was a miracle. That they can't just say it is unexplained shows they are not as honest as they claim to be. Where one says, "I saw Jesus standing glorious on a cloud", one should be saying, "I saw Jesus standing glorious on a cloud but I cannot explain how I saw it or if it was really him. Maybe there is a natural explanation even if nobody finds it."

WHAT MAKES A TESTIMONY TO MIRACLES

A testimony to miracles is only accepted on these presumptions and conditions:

#One presupposes without evidence that miracles happen.

One forgets that testimony is what faith in an event being a miracle is based on but testimony means presupposing that everything that happens is natural. For example, if a miracle could fool John that X murdered Y what use would any testimony be? You presuppose that there is no chance of supernatural tampering. This is not biased or unfair - it is in the nature of testifying that the possibility that the supernatural is interfering or manipulating is excluded.

#The witness is judged as reliable.

#The witness makes you feel you want to believe.

#You suspend judgment of, excuse or ignore anything that seems to suggest the inauthenticity of the miracle or the miracle account.

#The miracle is made fairly safe from refutation. A miracle account where you are told that the Virgin Mary has moved into a cottage down the road will be rejected outright but you feel safer believing she appeared to somebody yesterday for a while and this person alone could see her. This is really about trying to get yourself to believe. If you really that convinced that miracles happen you will not cherry-pick what miracle accounts to accept and what ones to reject or ignore. I am talking about when one miracle account is as well-substantiated as another. Miracle believers and healers and prophets are always careful to make it hard or impossible to test their claims. If you really believed you could heal you would tell a person not to let the doctors operate on her child's cancer but you don't. That contradiction and inconsistency makes it sensible to reject miracle testimonies and to regard a person who accepts them as stupid. The witness ruins the case their own own sincerity so their testimony can be dismissed.

#A miracle that one man got healed will be accepted while a miracle that claims the cure for cancer has been given by Heaven will be rejected. Again this is people trying to manipulate themselves and therefore others to believe. If one man is really miraculously healed then it is possible that a miracle revelation about the cure for cancer can come. The believers in miracles do not trust miracle claims as much as they say.

#A miracle that has some followers and believers will be heeded more than one that does not. This is not faith in miracles at work - it is our tendency to follow the crowd to fit in that is at work.

#A miracle from a loving God should be about inspiring people to love each other better. Thus it should be the lesson conveyed by the miracle that matters not believing in the miracle. If God appears to a dying man and gives him a drink of water, the lesson should be that we must help the dying and whether God really appeared should not matter. Miracles are magic if you assume that all supernatural events that cannot be attributed to pure divine love are magic. They downgrade your good side. Miracle tales are about something and it is not love even if they are sometimes made out to be love.

DARK SIDE OF DEPENDING MIRACLES ON WITNESS TESTIMONY

Every religion and believer rejects some miracle claims though there seems to be good testimony for them.

If you base your faith on testimony, you must always be open to new testimony and new light which means you have to be prepared to change your faith if you need to.

If you don't want to dismiss a miracle testimony as nonsense, you can decide to sit on the fence. That is a lot more sensible than believing in the testimony.

Hard evidence is better than testimony. Testimony is evidence with lesser force. If we put supreme importance on faith in a God of miracles then testimony will never be as good as hard evidence and cannot be enough.

The person who testifies to miracle only testifies that they interpret what they remember as a miracle. Faith in their testimony is impossible when all you have faith in is their interpretation.

People who care about what they want to believe more than about the truth are vain. They want to think they are being reasonable. They are being arrogant for they are not. We know such people when they won't look at the case against what they believe and when they ignore the truth though it bites them in the backside. The worst of them actually puts their belief or opinion in a framework that makes testing the truth of it impossible. For example, Christians say that God never ignores a sincere prayer. They say that if you don't get what you want you will get something as good or better. But good things happen to everybody! And so do bad things! By making a doctrine untestable the believers safeguard their arrogance and conceal it. Thus they worsen their arrogance. They oppose the person who rejects the doctrine or who without rejecting it sees no reason to accept it. They oppose it inside if not in their outward deeds. They might even be derisory. If they don't act that way they are derisory in another way for the framework they make and maintain is derisory. It is an insulting attitude to have towards the fair and dedicated truthseeker. They have taken the first step towards persecuting that person.

Arrogant people do not set out to act arrogant for they know it makes them look ridiculous. The crafty among them try to hide behind the mask of humility.

The believer in the supernatural is a bigger danger than the non-believer who worships and promotes the untestable. If the believer in Jesus found out that Judas rose from the dead and pretended to be Jesus he will say this discovery is actually a supernatural hoax. He will say that maybe Satan magically faked the evidence that it was Judas. If there is no supernatural or if you don't believe, then there are less ways of making something untestable.

THE CONTRADICTIONS OF USING MIRACLE TESTIMONY AS EVIDENCE

Belief in testimony is a necessary evil. Testimony helps but it is not enough to base faith in the magical on. Belief in testimony assumes there is no magical power out there to delude the person testifying to anything. When you ask somebody to believe you are saying that there is no magic that could mean you were magically fooled or misled. Testifying to a miracle is a contradiction for a testimony presupposes that miracles do not happen.

If you want to believe in miracles, you are going to have to forgo testimony and believe any nonsense.

Religion accepts the testimony of miracle witnesses when it has done no professional tests to see how much or how little people will lie about the supernatural. If too many people lie about the supernatural then its reasonable to deny that their miracle tales should be accepted. Believing would then be deranged.

Some say, "Everything we believe is based on testimony. Our senses testify to us. So it stands to reason that our feelings testify to us too. If we feel there is a God then it is reasonable to accept this testimony of our feelings. Some say their feelings have magical powers and the power to transform. We think the testimony of our feelings to God makes more sense and is more reasonable. Instead of doing magic let us submit to the will and love of God."

We say we accept the testimony of others about things. We never do. We testify to ourselves that we want to accept this testimony. We accept not the testimony we are given but the testimony we give ourselves. It is our testimony to the testimony that we accept not the testimony. That is why we should question and doubt particularly in religious matters. Trying to argue that feelings are enough is a recipe for chaos and confusion. It stifles the voice of reason.

The Church says if exceptional and perhaps miraculous events happen, we cannot reject them as unbelievable. If we do, we are saying no testimony however honest and sane the testifier is is any good. But let us consider this. If we reject belief in them, we need not really reject the wonders. We could be just not making a decision one way or another. Believers use testimony as a weapon and won't let us do that! And believing somebody experienced something that is not easily explained is enough. Miracle goes too far.

TESTIMONY IN PRINCIPLE IF NOT IN PRACTICE IS ALWAYS TO BE PROVISIONAL

Testimony is considered to be important in court and in life in general. It is evidence. But it must never be final. It must always be provisional. For example, if you send the person convicted of murder to jail because of the witnesses you must be prepared to revise or end that sentence if new testimony appears that casts doubt on his guilt or clears his name. Religion

asks for a lifelong commitment - you are expected to regard the testimony to the resurrection of Jesus as final and that is really an abuse of testimony. Catholicism is riddled these days with people claiming divine revelations from the Virgin Mary, Jesus and the Holy Spirit etc. Most of these revelations get no attention from the Church for they tend to be ignorant and vindictive. But surely if testimony is so important it follows that the Virgin and Co should be seen as dangerous spirits pretending to be good? Surely the testimonies show that say Mary is in reality a bad girl and it is dangerous to invoke her?

THE NEED FOR THE OUTRAGEOUS

If belief in miracles is based on testimonies, then it follows that it is the miracle stories told by the people that have the most sincerity that should be considered to be the most convincing. But the trouble is, the more absurd the report the more likely the testifier is to sincerely believe that he experienced a miracle! The implications are dangerous! The more the testifier gets ridiculed for his story and the stranger it sounds then the more sincere he is. Clearly then miracles are to be believed because they are so strange and bizarre. Jesus rising from the dead is not as convincing as a cat giving birth to fairies that then turn into pea soup.

It is true that miracles are only considered for belief and reverence if they are outrageous. This does not mean that the most horrifically outrageous ones will be selected. No - the ones that will be selected will be outrageous enough but not enough to put everybody off.

AM I A HYPOCRITE IF I DISMISS MIRACLE TESTIMONIES?

If I reject all miracle testimonies, that does not mean I am being hypocritical in accepting testimonies to more mundane or non-supernatural things. It looks as if I am for I often accept mundane or non-supernatural testimonies even on little or no evidence. That would seem unfair if there is reasonable or good evidence favouring the view that a miracle has happened. The logic is incorrect simply because miracle and mundane/non-supernatural are not the same thing. If you treat them the same then you can justify people shooting doctors on the basis that the Devil will turn all humankind to zombies if its not done. Indeed if you do not justify it you should. Miracle beliefs have dangerous implications. We experience the mundane and non-supernatural all the time so its not in the same category as a miracle.

I accept non-supernatural testimony quite easily for most of the time I do not catch witnesses out as liars. They might be liars and just not caught out. It seems to me that most testimonies are reliable.

You can never prove that somebody is truthful as you think so the best you can do is say that you trust them and you accept their testimony but not necessarily to the effect that a miracle they report is to be taken as having occurred. You might take it as something that could have occurred. You will not trust your beloved wife who you have known for years if she says she experienced an alien abduction. And she won't blame you. There is nothing wrong with that.

We have the right to reject even a reliable person's testimony if we think its silly. We do not accept everything even a reliable person says. The religionist who condemns unbelief in miracles is a bigot. If miracles encourage that attitude then we should hope that people will discard belief in them.

Reliable people may not be as reliable as we think. Good liars cover their tracks well. As we cannot check all things out all the time, our default position is that a person is probably telling us the truth. Liars take advantage of that.

What is convincing evidence for one person is unconvincing and useless to another. In other words, you might think your evidence is rational but others may not.

INTERPRETATION

A testimony of an event is not the same as your testimony of how you think the event should be interpreted. It is two separate matters.

Denying testimony to miracles would not mean denying the value of all human testimony but only when it testifies to miracles which are not of nature but we can still believe in natural events no matter how bizarre they are for they can happen and we know it. We can believe the person who says they saw the Virgin Mary but hold that there was a natural but inexplicable cause why they think they encountered an entity claiming to be her. Also, the person who believes a strange story but who denies miracles is not being inconsistent or unfair for nature says strange things happen but does not urge us to accept miracles for they could be lies or mistakes. We are not disputing the event or the testimony but only how the event is understood.

If we trust the testimony of those who experience miracles, the best we can do is trust that they experienced something they interpreted as miraculous. We do not have to trust their interpretation. Miracle believers always think that believing an interpretation is the same as believing in a miracle. They trick other people by doing this conjuring trick with truth.

It would be worrying if you accepted somebody's interpretation of an event as miraculous when you make little or no effort to examine how good they are likely to be as interpreters.

You cannot know what the miracle was if you know a miracle has happened. To say the miracle was this is to confuse the miracle with your interpretation. The Church says that if you refuse to believe testimony to miracles you can't justify listening to anything people say. But we all pick and choose what testimony we believe and the Church knows that and even allows that so it is just trying to manipulate us. To reject a good testimony to miracle, is not doing this as much as denying a good testimony to a more ordinary event is. If you believe in miracle then how do you "know" that the miracle really happened? Testimony? But what if the miracle was the alteration of their memories? If a miracle happened you might only know that the miracle happened but not know what the miracle was.

If I rely on you, it is not you but my judgement of you that I rely on. I never ever believe in a miracle - strictly speaking. I really believe in my assessment that a miracle has happened, not the miracle. If I believe in me, I must just believe in me. What do I need to even contemplate miracles for? Faith in miracles does not exist, strictly speaking. What you have is faith in the faith others, the witnesses, seem to possess.

THERE ARE UNREFUTED MIRACLES THAT ARE STILL UNTRUE

If being disbelieving towards all miracles means you automatically reject all testimony, then what about the vast majority of reported miracles and apparitions (that have never been proved to be naturalistic hoaxes and which believers will have to accept as possibly true) in which the vision lied or contradicted itself or others? If you have such respect for testimony then you will say there is evidence and testimony that visions are unreliable even if they are supernatural. That implies that you see that there are forces that can trick you to make a false statement. That implies that you could have seen your mother going to the shop this morning and it could have been a false memory inserted miraculously in your mind. Miracles therefore depend on human testimony while at the same time they undermine it drastically and endanger our faith in the senses and in each other. When I have to put myself first I cannot desecrate myself to undermine the knowledge I have for I need that knowledge and need as much faith in it as possible in order to be safe. Miracles, if they happen, are acts of violence and contempt and are aimed at the human mind.

THE REAL MIRACLE!

When the majority of people lie for no apparent reason about experiencing miracles and stand by their lies it is a miracle in itself if any miracle is true. The number of such claims is impossible to count and religions however gullible ignore nearly all of them which amounts to denying the reliability of the witnesses. A true miracle claim has to worry about the miracle of itself and the miracle of how its witnesses can be trusted enough!

HEARSAY

Believing in miracles while wanting to believe in them means you are biased and that is not good.

A person not wanting to believe but who makes an impeccable case for the miracle is an example of a person who is reliable for they fought the bias and did not let it colour their research.

A person who does not care if it happened or not but about whether or not the evidence points to it is as good.

The person who wants to believe and gives you the evidence is the least.

Hearsay would be enough if you want to believe. So miracles should be rare for anything that depends on hearsay too much is better being uncommon. God would not do many miracles which automatically means that most reports are suspect or false.

Believers in miracles say their belief is based on the evidence given by those who have seen miracles. It is based on hearsay and testimony. Hearsay is a very weak form of testimony and very unreliable. Testimony though not infallible is dependable to a higher level. The testimony to a miracle is only accepted by those who already accept miracles on hearsay. For example, a child grows up hearing magical and miracle stories. She bases this on what she hears. This paves the way for her to accept somebody's miracle testimony. Whoever says their faith in miracles is about the good testimony they have got is wrong or lying. It is more about the hearsay.

Be warned. A lot of what is called testimony to miracles or testimony to the reliability of witnesses is not testimony but mere hearsay!

FINALLY

There has to be some category of claim that must not be believed without sufficient evidence. Testimony will not do. Only evidence will. If it is not miracle or the supernatural that is in the category then its nothing! This is not about being biased or unfair. It is what we need to do. That's all. There are some things that must receive disbelief or scepticism no matter how dependable the testimony of the witness seems to be. There are some things that even good testimony isn't enough for. Testimony is not a reason to believe in miracles. There needs to be a limit on what is accepted on testimony. And if it is not miracles and the supernatural then there is no line.

There needs to be evidence apart from a mere testimony. It would be devastating if a hospital for example stopped giving chemotherapy and radiotherapy treatments just because some psychic or holy man said that if treatment is discontinued that the people who need the treatments will be instantly cured by the Holy Ghost. We would end up believing anything!

A person might be totally honest but a liar in relation to a miracle claim. It's the one lie one can never get caught out for telling. If somebody stares at a spot on the wall and says they are seeing the Virgin Mary there is no proof that they are not seeing her. The fraud knows that and uses it to her or his advantage. People jump to conclusions in the face of the unknown.

Somebody being totally honest refers to how they deal with other people. But lying to yourself occasionally is a different matter and everybody does it. So the real question if you report a miracle is, "Is it yourself you are lying to?"

Testimony means that another person has to be certain for you. You are vulnerable to their certainty and they may be only pretending to be that sure. Seeing others as certain impresses you and if you follow them you start to feel certain too though you are not. This is the essence of fundamentalism where you treat doctrines as if they were facts that cannot be denied.