

A WARNING ABOUT SUPERNATURAL RELIGIOUS BELIEFS, TESTIMONY IN PRINCIPLE IF NOT IN PRACTICE IS ALWAYS TO BE PROVISIONAL

Christianity says it is built on the value of the testimony of the apostles and other New Testament figures. They bore witness to what Jesus stood for, did and how he rose again to save us as our advocate in Heaven. It and other religions claim that miracles, acts of God that nature cannot do, are indeed true. For example you have the alleged miracle healings done by Jesus' mother at Lourdes.

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 if they won't accept them as in believing them) 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.

