

When Miracle Witnesses Lie...

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

Religion uses miracles as evidence for the truth of its claims.

Miracles are events that seem to be against nature or the way natural law usually runs. In other words, they cannot be explained by nature. Examples are the Blessed Virgin Mary appearing to children, the unexplained cure of incurable illness, blood coming out of nowhere on Catholic communion wafers, the sun spinning at Fatima in Portugal in 1917 and most importantly Jesus Christ coming back to life after being dead nearly three days. It is thought that only God can do these things.

People base their belief on miracles on the notion that those who testify to them are reliable. Religion says that if you just assume the witnesses are lying or stupid or wrong then you are being unfair and prejudiced against miracles. But we don't have to assume that. We decide what to believe on the basis of what a person says. Nobody believes even a reliable or honest person who testifies to something magical such as a ghost giving her the cure for cancer. That is not unfair or biased. And we can avoid MERELY assuming their testimony is wrong or deceitful. If you survey how many people are looked up to, and who still lie, and lie when the facts will come out and when they should know it, then to assume the miracle witness is a liar or in error is more of an insight into human nature than an assumption. The religious prejudice against miracle sceptics is based on the idea that they merely assume miracles are unbelievable. To challenge their nonsense is a mark of self-respect and self-defence in the sceptic.

When you think about how magicians who pretend to be psychics and miracle workers hardly ever come clean it shows that human nature tends to deceive about the reality of magic and miracle. And their accomplices and fans are as bad. Indeed they are worse for they do more to get people to believe than the fraud herself or himself. When people see the big number of fans and believers it is this that encourages them to believe. The fake psychic or miracle worker has supporters who tend to not care what critics think. They do not feel guilty. And their accomplices will not feel guilty either.

Sometimes the reason people lie is because a lie is more interesting than the truth. Sometimes you have something that is largely true but a few little lies are put into the mixture to spice it up. When a person lies without any need, the reason is because he or she wants to be more interesting.

Believers in miracles do not believe in miracles just because a good testimony says they happened. They say they do but they have other reasons for "believing". Real belief cares first and foremost about the truth. Nobody starts a religion based on the idea of a man coming back from the dead for the hell of it. The man has to come back for other reasons - to act as saviour, to make unbelievers look foolish etc. If you believe in miracles because you really care about the truth and consider testimony to miracles to be in the service of truth, you will believe in random miracles that seem to have no spiritual goal or purpose. You will believe the man who says his cat had a virgin birth.

When a person reports a miracle, the person sees herself as being part of God's plan so much that he changed nature. There is an incentive then to delude oneself that one has experienced something magical and special and thereby become special and privy to some experience that most other people will not have. Some people say God is not about miracles but about love. Indeed God would be far better working discreetly on two people to make them good at heart instead of healing a disease miraculously that he could heal through the doctors. No matter how humble the person who is in the middle of a miracle claims to be, that humility is fake. People are more interested in religions of miracles than religions of love. Many Catholics prefer the miracle disneyland of Medjugorje to serving others in the soup kitchen. People have a curiosity about the supernatural and like the honour of being witnesses of it - it makes them feel special. They are curious for a reason and that reason is self-glorification. If God reveals the truth and works his plan through miracles it follows that you should be ready for a miracle for his sake. In other words, if you have cancer expect him to take it away with a snap of his fingers. If miracles do not really make you better people and make you worse then it is prejudice to suppose the witnesses of them are telling the truth but it is not prejudice to suppose they are lying.

It is easier to believe your own lies (or think or feel you believe when you actually don't) and deceive yourself if others support you and depend on your lies. We have the ability to exercise cognitive dissonance where part of the brain seems to believe what another part of the brain says cannot be true or isn't true. We must remember that if somebody is kidding themselves that we cannot insist that they are sincere or excusable. And if we do, what happens if somebody is plainly lying? Do we say that it is only part of their brain is devoted to lies while the rest is devoted to the truth? Do we make the excuse that they are not responsible for this for it is mere self-deception? The world cannot function and we will endanger

ourselves if we start doing that! Those who engage in rationalisation - making excuses for nonsense - or who tell themselves that their feelings that something is true is the same as believing that it is true are always culpable.

Believers who are keen to get us to believe in miraculous wonders are trying to convert us for it gives them assurance that their faith is real and not a self-inflicted delusion. Their efforts speak of their own faith insecurity. That is why they will not tolerate us if we condemn or examine their miracles. They accuse us of being nasty people who offend their religion and their faith.

When people deploy cognitive dissonance, part of them knows the truth and challenging them is only about getting them to admit it. After all they want others to be deceived too - that is why we kid ourselves about things. It makes us better deceivers. Most of the atheists and humanists in the world are in mosques and Churches - they turn off their atheism when they go in the door.

A miracle witness who has little support may be more reliable than one who has a lot of support. The support can encourage and facilitate the witness's self-deception and intimidate her from coming clean if she is lying. The persons with lots of support are more suspect.

Some miracle witnesses may delude themselves that their perception that they are faking and lying is a trick of Satan. Maybe he is warping their thinking or putting fake memories in their minds.

We need to be able to assess if a person is exercising cognitive dissonance. A girl needs to be sure that her husband to be is not deceiving himself. So we need a criteria. We will start with the thought, "They don't really believe that!" If miracles and magic don't fall into that category and raise that question then nothing does. Miracles and magic are disgusting in the sense that they dismiss and attack our right to assess if somebody can really believe something. Without that criteria you could never say to a Hitler, "You say it is right to destroy those innocent people. You cannot really believe that." Instead you end up softly saying, "There is no point talking to him. He cannot and will not change."

Ultimately, believing in miracles for the love of God is impossible. If it is really about love you will not even care about miracles. The real motivation is to get yourself to believe the witnesses even if they are lying. It is not really about God. Believing that miracles come from God does not mean you believe out of respect for God. If miracles are not really about moral principles and respect it follows that sick people should demand a miracle from God and hate him if he doesn't bother. They then have the right to take a dying person to Lourdes and expect God to cure her or him!

The Church dismisses miracle claims if the claimant is known for telling too many lies. Rationally, the person lying in the past does not mean they are lying now. But by default, we cannot make the assumption that they are suddenly reliable. We know there could be too much at stake if we did. The Church agrees. It gives out against sceptics assuming miracles don't happen. The Church makes assumptions too.

If the testimony of unreliable people to miracles were taken seriously it would make it so easy to lie about a miracle and be believed. It would be hugely easier than what it is.

Religion needs to reject or at least ignore the testimony of miracle believers who do not understand the following cardinal religious doctrine, "God comes first. He forbids all lies. Thus if our telling the truth, hurts people that is sad but God comes first and its a necessary evil." The Roman Church has never checked out its miracle witnesses' knowledge of or acceptance of the doctrine. Knowing the doctrine would not prove that the person is telling the truth. But it is better to heed the person who takes the doctrine seriously than a person who doesn't even know about it or understand it.

Miracles that few want to believe in are soon forgotten. If people want to believe, that is when the miracle gets attention. And the Church and the investigators may come along to check out the miracles if the attention is great enough and publicised enough. The more people want to believe or the more people who want to believe, the greater the chance of self-deception. Even the most honest of people sometimes want to fool themselves and be fooled. You can never even partly tell if a person is telling the truth about experiencing a miracle. All you can do is assume. You can't just assume a miracle report is true. You need evidence.

Some miracle liars feel pressured by the devotion their lies arouses in people. They feel they are letting them down if they admit the fraud. They feel that doing good has a dark side anyway so they might reason that if they are doing wrong it results in more good than bad and that is all that matters.

The Catholic Church teaches that it is a mortal sin to lie that God has done something when you know or believe that he has not. But through priests being more interested in fitting in society than in being real Catholics, mortal sin is hardly believed in by anybody any more. People might have thought in the past that a visionary would not be lying for she or he would fear it would be a mortal sin. But they cannot think that these days.

If a murderer said he was miraculously forced by Satan to kill the Church would assume he is a liar until proven truthful. The same dishonest Church applies a different standard when some little girl thinks she sees the Virgin Mary in a vision or if she claims a miracle cure!

Even if a miracle tale is not a lie or a mistake but is true, it does not stop witnesses and their supporters telling lies about the meaning of the miracle. What if Bernadette saw Satan instead of the Virgin Mary and lied about it being Mary? What if a miracle cure of cancer that leads people to think God is trying to say he wants all people in the Catholic Church really happened but the witnesses are lying that it had anything to do with religion? There is intense pressure as well to say that a miracle means something. If you say it just happened people won't be interested.

Miracle witnesses have to be assumed to be in error or lying until it is proven otherwise. Otherwise society will go mental believing all kinds of superstition.