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Miracles

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MIRACLES

by

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INTRODUCTION

In this age of Rationalism we are told that Christianity would in the main be acceptable if it were purged of its miraculous element. As a result certain authors have attempted to write a life of Christ from which all miracles are excluded. One might just as well write a life of Caesar and omit all reference to his wars. The tendency to minimize the miraculous, to explain it away, or to reduce it to fable and allegory, arises from this spirit of Rationalism. To a very large extent this is due to a misunderstanding of the nature of the miraculous, and its relation to the First Cause and to Natural laws and forces. The fundamental difficulty to the disbelievers in miracles is a misconception of the nature and attributes of God. If the First Cause is not recognized as Infinite, All-Wise, All-Powerful and Free, no amount of argument will carry a conviction of the possibility and probability of the miraculous.

The subject of miracles is one of the highest importance, and in regard to which all compromise is impossible. The records of the human race all the world over bear testimony to the universal belief in miracles, and to their actual occurrence. It is incredible that men of all nations, times and places should have conspired in deliberately alleging that which is untrue.

(1) Cf. Marsh, Gideon W. B., Miracles, B. Herder, Publisher, St. Louis, 1906, 3.
It is also incredible that these same people, ignorant and learned alike, should all have been deceived. Certainly then, Miracles are worthy of examination even by the scientists of the twentieth century.

In this work we shall approach the question of miracles in the following manner: first, we shall point out the erroneous views that various schools of philosophy have regarding miracles; secondly, we shall explain the true nature of miracles, with emphasis on the teaching of St. Thomas Aquinas; thirdly, we shall show that miracles are both intrinsically and extrinsically possible and that they are very highly probable, also that they can be recognized as such; and lastly, we shall criticize the erroneous views mentioned in the first part of this thesis and then show that miracles have occurred all down through history even to our own day.
CHAPTER I
Objections Regarding Miracles

Perhaps the basic error in the world today regarding miracles is that of the rationalists. Rationalism (from Latin, ratio, "reason") is the doctrine of those who deny the existence or need of Divine Power, Guidance or Authority, for they assert that there are no supernatural truths. Rationalism asserts that human reason is adequate to cope with all truths that exist. In a word, Rationalism teaches that there are no truths outside the reach of the human mind. It finds Faith opposed to reason. And so, Rationalism aims to reduce a miracle to an extraordinary event that results from natural laws as yet unknown.

"The rationalists are of opinion that truth is easy to attain, and therefore undertake to bring all things within the compass of reason, a human reason which has no need to submit humbly and patiently to the discipline, whether of reality itself, a teacher, or God." Rationalism leads to Subjectivism, which takes as its criterion of truth the knowing subject, not the object to be known; or it leads to Individualism, which calls upon each philosopher to create his own novel view of the universe; or it leads to Naturalism, which rejects all divine teaching.

(3) Cf. Ibid, 183.
Spinoza — who belonged to the school of Determinism — traced more or less directly his philosophy back to Descartes — the father of modern Rationalism. Spinoza was a Determinist because he denied that God was free. He denied the possibility of a miracle since he held that God acts always from the necessity of his Nature so that His action is invariable. Spinoza taught that the term "miracle" should be understood with reference to the opinions of men, and that it means simply an event which we are unable to explain by other events familiar to our experience. Thus, the miracles of one age become the ordinary workings of nature in the next age. Hence, to Spinoza a miracle never happens in fact, and is only a name to cover our ignorance.

The well-known argument of David Hume against the credibility of a miracle has often been refuted. A miracle, he said, was contrary to experience; a violation of the laws of nature. With this misunderstanding of the nature of a miracle as his foundation, he has raised his famous structure of arguments against the miraculous.

The first principles and true spirit of modern Rationalism were revealed by Immanuel Kant. Through Kant, and his subjectivist philosophy, Rationalism has joined hands with its opposite, Skepticism, and became absorbed in the anti-intellectualism of the modernists. Kant held that we cannot know the reality corresponding to our ultimate scientific, philosophic or religious ideas, but only their appearances.
Kant thought that we cannot gain knowledge by the use of the speculative reason of the natures of things; but only of their appearances. If the natures of things themselves are not determinate, but purely contingent, we could not talk about the course of nature; and so by implication, could not recognize a miracle, i.e., a deviation from this course of nature either. In this view, then, miracles are but apparent exceptions to an apparent rule.” (4)

Kant’s Phenomenalism is but a manifestation of modern Agnosticism. Agnosticism (from Greek "agnostikos", not knowing, ignorant) is the philosophical theory which limits the extent and validity of knowledge. As a term of modern philosophy, Agnosticism is used to describe those theories (subjectivism and positivism) which deny the ability of the mind to know reality and conclude with the recognition of an intrinsically unknowable. The modern agnostic claims that the advance in science has made the belief in the miraculous impossible. Some have tried to explain the recorded miracles of scripture by a reference to natural causes. Others would treat them as allegories, or legendary accretions or folk-tales.

Deism is that philosophy which admits the existence of God but denies his providence over the world, hence, denies absolutely the possibility of a miracle. Deism agrees in principle with Rationalism, the essence of which consists in the position that reason is not merely the formal but also the material principle

of religion and supreme arbiter over the whole substance of the Christian Faith.

This (Deism) is in many respects the antithesis of Pantheism. According to Pantheism, God exists only in the world as its soul; according to Deism, He exists only above the world as a personal spirit, who after creating the world by His will, now acts towards it like an artificer with a finished machine, which mechanically pursues its natural course according to the laws laid down for it, and no longer requires the immediate assistance or interference of its maker.

The being, personality and supramundane nature of the Deity, and the creation of the world by Him, are thus acknowledged; while, on the other hand, any continuous active presence of God in the world, and any living interposition in its affairs are denied. The world has outgrown its leading-strings, and emancipated from Divine control is now left to itself. There is no special providence; miracles are an impossibility. Everything takes place in harmony with natural laws, which are implanted in the universe and suffer no alteration whatsoever. This is the chief character of the deistical theory. (5)

Materialism is the philosophy which asserts that there is nothing but matter, and that what we call mind or soul is but one of its aspects. According to the materialists, there is no immortality, and no Intelligent and Personal First Cause of all things. They recognize in nature only blind forces, inexorable laws, that are from eternity and unto eternity; that can know no change, no deviation, from their onward course. Naturally, the man who believes in pure Materialism finds no place in his

interpretation of nature for the soul or for God. To the Materialist, a miracle, of course, is an impossibility.

Hence, the attitudes of the Rationalists, Determinists, Phenomenalists, A Priorists, Deists and Materialists are seen to be erroneous on two scores: first, their conception of what the philosopher terms a miracle is utterly erroneous; and secondly, their denial of the miraculous is fundamentally irrational. We shall return to a critical consideration of these attitudes later. For the present we shall take up the question of the true nature of a miracle.
CHAPTER II

Nature of Miracles and Their Classification

We are thus brought to a consideration of what truly constitutes a miracle. The word has been used very loosely and carelessly. We see advertisements daily which promise "miraculous" results from the use of certain goods or medicines. We hear people exclaim "Miracle!" as soon as something startling is encountered. It is as nonsensical to call every new and exciting discovery or experience miraculous as it is to deny that any experience can be miraculous.

The word "miracle" comes from the Latin, "miraculum" meaning "a wonderful thing," "a marvel". But the world is full of wonderful things and marvels. Every sunrise, every living thing is full of marvels - but they are not miracles. The telephone, the airplane, the radio would have been miraculous in this sense of the word to our forefathers of a thousand years ago - but they are not miracles. Miracles are always the wonderful, but the wonderful is not always the miraculous. We do not call these marvels in the world by the name of miracle because, in our technical sense of the word, a miracle is something not only marvelous but extraordinary. In other words, a miracle is something not in the usual course of nature. Furthermore, a miracle is an event produced, either directly or through an instrument, by the power of Almighty God. Finally, a miracle is a sensible event, that is,
it can be observed in this world of bodies.

These works that are sometimes done by God outside the usual order assigned to things are wont to be called miracles; because we are astonished (admiramur) at a thing when we see an effect without knowing the cause. And since at times one and the same cause is known to some and unknown to others, it happens that of several who see an effect, some are astonished and some are not: thus an astronomer is not astonished when he sees an eclipse of the sun, for he knows the cause; whereas one who is ignorant of this science must needs wonder, since he knows not the cause. Wherefore it is wonderful to the latter but not to the former. Accordingly a thing is wonderful simply, when its cause is hidden simply; and this is what we mean by a miracle: Somethine, to-wit, that is wonderful in itself and not only in respect of this person or that. Now God is the Cause which is hidden to every man simply: ... Therefore, properly speaking, miracles are works done by God outside the order usually observed in things. (6)

Therefore, before we can call an event a miracle the following three factors must be present: (1) a sensible effect; (2) produced by God; (3) transcending all the forces of nature. We shall now consider these three essential elements of a miracle and see what each implies.

A miracle is a sensible effect, that is to say, it is a phenomenon—something which is capable of being observed by the senses. It is intended to be seen by men, and hence it is subject to the laws of evidence. When, for example, God, through the ministry of

his priests, causes bread and wine to be changed substantially into the Body and Blood of Christ, we have an extraordinary marvel. Yet we do not call this marvel a miracle, since it cannot be observed with bodily eyes.

A miracle, moreover, is an effect and therefore must have a cause. The human mind is so constituted that on seeing a phenomenon it immediately asks the "why" of it. In examining natural phenomenon, we seek to find the cause, and having succeeded, we observe that the effect always follows on the action of that cause. Hence, numerous experiments are possible whereby this causality may be demonstrated and confirmed. Miracles are, of their very nature, not experimental effects that can be produced at pleasure. It is the Divine Will which acts as the cause, when and how it deems best. God, and God alone, is the First Cause of the miraculous. "None save the maker of a law can change that law or dispense therefrom... Now God alone framed the law of nature's course. Therefore he alone can work miracles by acting independently of the natural course." (7)

Now God may either produce a miracle directly by and of Himself, or by delegating the power to a creature with an express command to act for Him and in His name.

It is evident that God alone works miracles by His sole command. Now we find that the divine commands reach the lower rational spirits, namely, the souls of men, by means of the higher spirits, namely the angels, as in the promulgation of the Old Law. In the same way the divine

(7) Aquinas, Saint Thomas, De Potentia Dei, Burns, Oates & Washbourne Ltd., London, 1933, Q. 6, a. 4, c.
commands can, through angelic and human spirits, reach corporeal creatures through whom in a manner of speaking the divine decrees are intimated in nature. Accordingly, human and angelic spirits act somewhat as instruments of the divine power for the accomplishment of a miracle. This does not mean that they are possessed of a permanent habitual power, since then they would be able to work miracles whenever they chose to do so. (8)

Hence, God alone works miracles by the power of His Authority, but He can communicate to creatures the power to work miracles, according to the creatures' capacity and the order of Divine Wisdom.

Now the third essential part of our definition is that a miracle must transcend the forces of nature. It must go beyond and exceed the capabilities of the natural order, but that does not mean that it must violate or be contrary to them. By putting such words as "violate" and "contrary to" in the definition only gives rise to many misunderstandings. It is true that a miracle is an event outside the usual course of nature, but it does not violate or go contrary to the course of nature. "This phrase (outside the course of nature) does not mean that a miracle is of rare occurrence; it means that miracles, whether rare or frequent, are not events within the usual course of nature; they are not events which nature includes in her normal processes...." (9)

Thus if a dead man were raised to life every day, this would still


(9) Glenn, Paul J. Cosmology, B. Herder Book Co., St. Louis, 1939, 313.
be a miracle, because it would be something beyond the natural course of events.

Let us now see how many ways a miracle may transcend or go beyond the forces of nature. St. Thomas Aquinas divides miracles into the following three classes: miracles above nature (miracula supra naturam), miracles beside nature (miracula praeter naturam), and miracles against nature (miracula contra naturam). Of course, all miracles are above nature, that is, supernatural in the sense that they are wrought by God. But St. Thomas' distinction is based upon the remoteness or approximation of the miracle to the course of nature.

It is customary to divide the miraculous works of God into those which are done above, those which are done against, and those which are done without nature. — A miracle is above nature when God produces an effect which nature is wholly incapable of producing. This happens in two ways. First, when God induces into matter a form which nature is utterly unable to induce, for instance, the form of glory, which God will induce into the bodies of the elect; and again the Incarnation of the Word. Secondly, when nature, although able to induce a particular form into some matter, is unable to induce it into this particular matter: thus nature is able to produce life, but not to produce it in this corpse. A miracle is contrary to nature, when nature retains a disposition contrary to the effect produced by God; for instance, when He prevented the three children in the furnace from being hurt, while the fire retained the power to burn; and when the waters of the Jordan stood while retaining the force of gravity; and again when a virgin gave birth to a son. — A miracle is done by God without nature, when He produces an effect which nature can produce, but in a manner of which nature is incapable. This may be either through lack of the instruments
which nature is wont to employ...or because it is produced in less time than nature can produce it, as when a person is instantly cured... Evidently, then, all such works, if we take into account both the substance and the manner of these things done, surpass the faculty of nature. (10)

However it must be understood that whatever is done by God is not contrary to nature, although it may seem to be contrary to the order proper to a particular nature. God, the creator and author of all natures, does nothing unnatural—because to each thing, that is natural which is caused by God. All creatures, we might say, are compared to God as works of art are to an artist. Hence all nature is the work of Divine Art. Now it is not inconsistent with a work of art that the artist make some alteration in his work even after giving it its first form. Neither, therefore, is it contrary to nature if God does something in natural things other than that which occurs in the ordinary course of nature. (11)

There are, then, three ways in which a miracle may transcend or go beyond the forces of nature, i.e., there are three classifications of the miraculous.

In the first place, the miracle may be wholly and entirely beyond the known or possible powers of nature in any case or under any circumstances. Such miracles are called miracles of substantial fact (miracula quoad substantiam facti). It is, for instance, quite impossible physically for two bodies to be in one...

(11) Cf. Contra Gent. III, Q. 100
and the same place at the same time. Every physical body has certain dimensions, and these bear an exact relation to the space occupied by it—so definite a relationship that the simultaneous presence of two bodies in the same place is physically impossible. It is only by Divine Power, i.e., by a miracle, that the accidental quality of dimension can be removed from a body, so that it may be in the same place as another body, and yet remain distinct from it.

In the second rank are those events which could be produced by natural forces but not in the person or thing in which they occur. These are called miracles of subject (miracula quoad subjectum) because the thing or the person in which or to which an effect occurs is called the subject of the occurrence. For example, nature gives life, but it never has nor can it give renewed human life to a corpse. It is not miraculous for a man to be alive, but it is miraculous for a corpse to serve as the subject of life-giving forces.

The third class of miracles are known as miracles of manner or mode (miracula quoad modum). These are divinely produced events or effects which could be produced by natural powers but not in the same way or manner as they are miraculously produced. Thus, the sudden healing of an open wound is a miracle of manner. The miracle is not that the wound was healed but that the wound (12) was healed instantaneously.

In this part of our thesis we have shown the true nature of the miraculous and the three classes into which miracles are divided. We shall now take up the question of the abstract possibility of miracles.
A thing is said to be possible when it can become an actuality, i. e., when it can exist or be done. A thing is intrinsically possible when there is no self-contradiction in the very thought which represents it as an actuality. A thing is extrinsically possible when there exists a power which can cause it to become actual. Of course, such a power always exists when we extend our view of things possible to include the Omnipotence of God as well as the powers of nature. A thing intrinsically possible is thus extrinsically possible to God.

Thus, things which are not intrinsically possible cannot be produced at all. For example, there can be no such thing as a "square circle" because it means a circle which is not a circle; the terms "square" and "circle" contradict each other. Hence a square circle is not a thing—but a nothing, a non-entity. God could not produce one, but

This is not saying that the power of God is limited. For what is intrinsically possible is a contradiction in itself, and amounts to nothing at all.

We assert that miracles are intrinsically possible, and by this assertion we mean that miracles are not self-contradictory things which are not even conceivable as actualities.

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(13) cf. op. cit., 316
is there a contradiction involved in the very concept of a miracle? Is it contradictory to suppose that an effect can be produced in nature and yet not by a cause in the natural order? There would be a contradiction involved here if the laws of nature were absolutely necessary, for then no effect could occur in nature without the intervention of a natural cause. But (as we shall now see) these laws are only hypothetically necessary. There is, then, no contradiction involved in the concept of an effect produced in nature without the intervention of a natural cause. "The fact that secondary causes are ordered to determinate effects is due to God; wherefore since God ordains other causes to certain effects He can also produce certain effects by Himself without any other cause." (16)

Miracles are possible if there is nothing on the part of the physical laws or on the part of God to render them impossible. So before we continue our discussion as to the possibility of a miracle, it will be necessary to consider briefly what is really meant by a law of nature. Such an explanation is indispensable to all controversy regarding miracles. "To discuss the possibility of the exception without first determining the character of the rule, can hardly be expected to lead to satisfactory results." (18)

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(17) I, Q. 105, a. 1, ad. 3.

(18) Joyce, G. H. S. J., *The Question of Miracles*, B. Herder, Publisher, St. Louis, 1914, 2.
Now just what is a law of Nature? How necessary are the laws of nature? If we ask what we are to understand by a law of nature, we might reply that it is a uniform mode of activity which natural agents of the same type observe when placed in similar circumstances. This is, in fact, the way in which we generally regard a law of nature, as an empirically observed uniformity; and in itself such an idea does not imply necessity in these laws. St. Thomas, however, considers natural laws as necessary. The world is, for him, made up of a variety of beings, each and all of which, except in the case of free agents, act necessarily in accordance with these natures. Thus the laws of nature are not merely observed uniformities of action on the part of creatures, but govern them necessarily. If this be so, how is any exception to such action possible? The answer is that since the laws we are speaking of attach to the action of creatures, and not to their being, they effect them as efficient and final causes, not as formal and material ones. Now efficient and final causes are extrinsic causes, acting externally, and so can be prevented from taking effect without the nature or action being altered in itself, as the intrinsic causes (formal and material) could not be altered.

The laws of nature are said to necessitate nature. But does this mean that the laws of themselves are so necessary that they cannot be suspended in any case? Some philosophers would answer

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this question in the affirmative, e.g. the pantheists, materialists, atheists and rationalists, but they are demonstrably wrong. "There is need, in answering this question, to make a clean distinction: we must distinguish the laws as they stand revealed and active in the creatures which they regulate, and the same laws, with reference to the Creator." The laws of nature are not necessary with reference to God—they are contingent; but they are necessary with reference to creatures. Thus, it is said that the laws of nature are hypothetically necessary—not absolutely necessary.

Metaphysical necessity is called absolute because it is unconditioned. Thus we say that the existence and attributes of God are absolutely necessary because they are independent of any condition whatever. Absolute necessity is therefore that which is independent of any condition or proviso. On the other hand, the material world and its forces do not necessarily exist; their existence is contingent on the Will of the Creator, and their non-existence is readily conceivable. But even granted their existence, it must also be granted that the forces of nature can be annulled, overcome or supplanted by the Power that made them. Hence, the necessity with which material agents act is conditioned on the non-interference of the Maker. Such necessity is called hypothetical. Hypothetical necessity is therefore that which is dependent upon some condition which need not be verified. (21)

St. Thomas makes a clear distinction between absolute and hypothetical necessity. The former, he says, is simple necessity; it is predicated of that which under all and every supposition

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(20) Glenn, Paul J., Cosmology, 301.

must be as it is. The latter is hypothetical necessity. A certain thing may be necessary but only provisionally so; that is, it must be as it is when a certain hypothesis is realized.

Hence, the laws which govern the being of an object are strictly, that is, absolutely necessary; but the laws which govern activity are only hypothetically necessary.

Now miracles are also extrinsically possible. As we stated before, anything is extrinsically possible when there exists a power which can cause it to become actual. Anyone who acknowledges the existence of God, the Creator and Conserver, must acknowledge that everything intrinsically possible must be extrinsically possible to the absolute power of God.

In our introduction we said that the fundamental difficulty to the disbelievers in miracles is a misconception of the nature and attributes of God. If the First Cause is not recognized as All-Powerful, Free and All-Wise, no amount of argument will carry a conviction of the possibility of the miraculous.

First, then, we assert that God is All-Powerful, i.e., Omnipotent. This means that the power of God is infinite, and so not limited by anything except the contradictory. God, then, so far as His power goes, could work miracles, provided that to do so does not involve a contradiction either in Himself or in created things. But we have already seen that a miracle does not involve a contradiction in created things because the laws of nature

are only hypothetically necessary.

Now God is the Infinite and Necessary Being. Every created thing, whether actual or possible, is finite and contingent. God can, therefore, never exhaust His Power in the creation of any possible number of beings. There is, and must be, so to speak, always an infinite reserve of power left in God, and so He is ever able to act in His dealings with a creature in other ways than those which He has laid down as the ordinary laws of its being. He can produce the same effects as are produced by the forces He has created, without employing these forces, as He can also produce effects which are utterly beyond their capabilities, and so of necessity a miracle is always possible.

Secondly, we assert that God is All-Wise. "The Divine Wisdom shines forth in the plan of the universe and Omnipotence in the execution of the plan." We notice daily in this world of ours a marvelous order. "The deeper, fuller, and exacter our knowledge of the wonderful order of the universe grows, the more profound and the more comprehensive becomes our conviction of the infinite Wisdom of the Divine Designer."

Thirdly, and lastly we assert that God is Free. God possesses the perfection of free will in an infinitely imminent degree. He freely chooses whether or not creatures shall exist and what manner

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of existence shall be theirs.

Variations of natural law must come within the scope of this liberty, for God, in establishing the natures of creatures, and their action on natural law, did so freely; in as much as there is an infinite distance between the Divine Goodness and any created good, so that God could have created an infinity of worlds which differ from the present one both in their nature and laws. He therefore acted freely in the creation of this one. Moreover, God is free with respect to the application and working of these laws, in the universe as at present constituted, for this application and exercise depends immediately on the action of the natural agent, whose action in turn depends upon the First Agent, or God. Thus the application of all hypothetically necessary laws depends on the free will of God who is not tied down by such laws, not bound to apply them; so that to prevent or modify the action of these laws does not involve any contradiction in the nature of God. From the point of view of God's action, there is, therefore, nothing which would make it impossible for Him to work miracles. (26)

Deus ergo potest agere praeter et supra ordinem agendi totius naturae creatae, seu miraculum facere; et cum hoc facit, non agit contra naturam, sed secundam potentiam obedientiam, qua quaelibet creatura apta natatem obedire Deo ad accipiendum quidquid ipse voluerit, sicut instrumentum obedientiartifici, aut brachium humanae voluntatis. Est una sola causa efficiens et unus finis, praeter quos Deus agere nequit, scil.ipsa causa prima et finis ultimus omnium rerum.(27)

We should now examine whether or not miracles, being possible, are probable. Is it likely that the First Cause will directly intervene or "interfere" with the workings of Natural Laws for a

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human being? The goodness of God makes it in the highest degree likely, God did not create man and then cast him adrift as the Deists would have us believe. Why did God endow man with a free will unless it is that He is attentive and ready to help man attain the end for which he is made? And if a human parent will lay aside all ordinary rules to save and help his child in its hour of extreme need, what laws may God not be willing, as He is able, to transcend, in order that His rational creatures may attain to the end for which they were made.

God made man for a purpose; therefore, He must wish that he attain that purpose. And since God is infinitely Good and Wise, He will not spare any means to help man realize the chief object of his existence. Hence, miracles are in the highest degree probable.

If God desires to make known to man the free decrees of His will, over and above those to which He has committed Himself by the fact of creation, He must employ some other means than those offered by the necessary active forces of nature. These free choices of God cannot be known to us unless God speaks to us, unless He tells us Himself that which nature cannot tell. In order that we may know it is God Who vouches for the truth of the communication, some sign must be given us that sign is the miracle; it is God's seal of approval. Thus man's elevation to a supernatural destiny could never be known from the study of nature alone. The free decree of God can be known only on the authority of God revealing it. We believe on the Authority of God, indeed; but we need the sign to let us know it is

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God who speaks. God may use a miracle to express His Providence in a special manner, e. g., by a cure of a sick person in answer to prayer. These moral values are in no way attainable by nature alone. It is by the exception to the course of nature that God speaks. Hence all irrational nature holds within itself that power to speak in the name of God. This being the case, it is not only possible, but antecedently probable that miracles should be wrought; for if they were never wrought, that power of nature would forever lie idle and unused.(29)

Since the purpose of miracles is to serve as a sign, it stands to reason that they must be capable of recognition. For if a sign cannot be known, it cannot be a sign. In this thesis we merely aim to show that in some cases at least miracles can be recognized as such with certainty. When we say "as such", we mean that not only are we sure that the event occurred but that it occurred by a special intervention of God.

The verity of a miracle includes, ordinarily, three truths: the historical, the philosophical, and the theological. The historical truth means that the event occurred, that it is an historical fact. The philosophical truth means that the event exceeds the power of visible creation. The theological truth means that the event is such as could not be attributed to an evil spirit. (30)

A miracle is, by definition, an event perceptible by the senses. Hence, we cannot require any greater evidence than that we saw, heard, etc. the proofs. "Now, persons whose senses are in normal


condition...can have correct knowledge of what occurs before them. And we can know that the senses of the witnesses were normal from our knowledge of how they report other events which were not deemed miraculous by them."

"The evidence for the fact must be of the same character which the historian would demand and find sufficient. The evidence for the miraculous nature of the fact consists in the absolute insufficiency of the actually available factors to explain the event."

Miracles can be recognized as such if their philosophical truth can be established. And it can be established. To ascertain the philosophical truth we must make certain that the event could not be the result of natural forces either left to themselves or employed by the skill of man. It is not impossible to make sure of this, for although we do not know everything that these forces can do, we know what, under certain circumstances, they cannot do; and we know many things which they cannot do under any circumstances whatsoever. We know, for instance, that the sound of the human voice cannot cure leprosy, or restore life to a corpse corrupting in the grave.

In order to establish the theological truth of a miracle we have only to exclude the agency of any bad spirits, who may perform a marvel without the command, cooperation or approval of God. These spirits are creatures under the dominion of God, and therefore God cannot allow them perfectly to stimulate His own deeds; other-


(33) cf. McWilliams, J. A., op. cit., 175.
wise they could frustrate the whole purpose of His creation. Therefore if evil spirits effect any marvelous event there will always be about it something to enable us to distinguish from an act of God. For example, the conditions of observation will be dubious or suspicious, the persons who sponsor the display will be of at least uncertain moral character, the ultimate effects will be to foster vice and pride and the purpose of the event will be opposed to the honor of God and the good of man.

It is clear, therefore, that these results of magic are produced by some external spirits; not however by righteous and good spirits; and this is clear for two reasons. First, because good spirits would not associate themselves with wicked men, such as are the majority of magicians; secondly, because they would not co-operate with man in wrong-doing, which is often the result of magic. It remains then for us to conclude that they are produced by evil spirits whom we call demons. (34)

Our safeguard in recognizing miracles lies in regarding the end for which such occurrences take place. If it comes from God, i.e., if it is a true miracle the Divine Glory must be its object. If it comes from an evil spirit, and therefore not a true miracle, its motive will reveal itself as one which tends to lead men astray from the path of natural right. A miracle can never be worked for self-glorification. The end of a miracle must always be the Divine Glory, and the edification and instruction of man in the attributes of God.

(34) Cf. op. cit., 175-176.

(35) De Potentia, Q. 6, a. 10, c.
CHAPTER IV

The Fact of Miracles

Once we understand the true order of nature and her laws and once we understand that God is Infinite, that He is All-Wise, All-Powerful and that He acts with Divine Freedom according to eternal decrees, we can have no difficulty in solving modern objections against the possibility of miracles. In the first part of our thesis we pointed out a few of these modern errors, and now we shall criticize them and show their absurdity.

The first of these errors was Rationalism. Now Rationalism can be criticized in the following manner:

Rationalism amounts to Atheism, to a denial of God. Grant the existence of God (as reason demands of you), and you grant Infinity. Grant Infinity, and you grant Boundless Knowledge. Grant Boundless Knowledge, and you grant the existence of truths which the limited mind of man cannot possess. Grant such truths and you deny Rationalism. (36)

The Rationalists say that Divine Faith is opposed to human reason. But Divine Faith is not opposed to reason; it aids and perfects reason. It confirms reason in its findings on such matters as the origin of the world and the immortality of the soul. And in matters strictly supernatural, Divine Faith enriches reason with truths that could not be otherwise known and certainly possessed. The thing that is opposed to reason is not Faith, but Rationalism.

(36) Glenn, Paul J., *Criteriology*, 244, B. Herder Book Co, St. Louis, 1939.
Spinoza, as we have seen, denied the possibility of miracles because he held that God always acts from the necessity of His Nature and that His Action is invariable. Spinoza's difficulty regarding the perturbation of order by miracles has been repeated by Voltaire, Strauss and others, and seems to be a chief stumbling-block for many, because they forget the distinction between order as conceived by God and order as manifested in the uniformity of nature. Now order conceived by God reigns everywhere; and order as manifested in the uniformity of nature is the regular thing, but there are exceptions for wise reasons. Such exceptions are no more perturbations of the laws of nature than in human society privileges modifying the tenor of a general, civil or criminal law, granted by the law-giver at the same time he establishes the law, and granted with wise limitations, can be called abrogations of the law itself.

Kant denies miracles because according to him a miracle would destroy the foundations of certainty. If we recall what has been said about the necessity of natural laws, we shall remember that they are only hypothetically necessary, and that consequently the certainty founded on them is likewise only hypothetical. We can have certainty of what will occur if the law is carried out, and we can be certain that the law will be carried out unless there is question of obtaining some good in the supernatural order. Whether

(37) cf. Boedder, Bernard, Natural Theology, 427
miracles are worked or not, our certainty of the operation of the natural laws is unchanged.

In recent times many philosophers and physicists have put forward the view that the laws of nature are statistical generalizations, and so are not in anyway necessary, their apparent fixity being due to our way of conceiving them. This idea in philosophy is derived from the Phenomenalism of Kant, who thought that we cannot gain knowledge by the use of the speculative reason of the natures of things, but only of their appearances. Now physical science may well use such a hypothesis as this for its own purposes, but it is illegitimate to transfer it into Metaphysics, and assert that since science can deal with its data most conveniently on this assumption, the natures of things themselves are not determinate, but purely contingent. If they were so we could not talk about the course of nature or of miracles either of which are a deviation from this course.

Hume argues that we have only the testimony of some persons in favor of the occurrence of a miracle. He concludes that it is more probable that these persons should be deceived or make false statements than that there should be an exception to a law of nature.

But in order to get the constant and uniform experience against a miracle, Hume must leave out the experience of all those who give testimony in favor of a miracle. If he includes this testimony the experience will

not be uniformly against the occurrence of a miracle. If he does not include it, he is not honestly presenting the case. Moreover, it is more improbable that the witnesses in the circumstances required for the certainty of a miracle should lie or be deceived, than that a law of nature should not be observed. For we can account for the non-observance of the law of nature in the case. God can work a miracle if there is a reason for it. But we could not account for the witnesses, in the circumstances described, lying or being deceived, for in those circumstances there is no reason for a lie or for deceit. (38)

In the next place, Hume says that a universal testimony has established the fact that there are no exceptions to the laws of nature; that is to say, that there is no evidence for the miraculous. This is not true, and is a begging of the whole question, for we have a vast amount of human evidence in favor of the occurrence of miracles. We have but to appeal to the pages of sacred and profane history, and the annals of the world, to find human testimony in abundance. Some of it has been proved to be incontrovertible as, for instance, in the Resurrection of Christ from the dead. Many, very many, miracles have been established as facts, and that on human evidence of the most reliable description, which at once disproves Hume’s statement that all human experience is against the occurrence of the miraculous. (39)

The Deist maintains that miracles imply an imperfection in the Divine workmanship—an imperfection which God is bound to rectify from time to time, and that this is derogatory to the

(39) McCormick, John F., Scholastic Metaphysics, Part II, 278.
Supreme Wisdom and Power. But such an idea involves an entire misconception of a miracle, which is no interference with the laws of nature, as we have already seen, but merely a suspension of the particular effects of a particular law, by the introduction of a higher force for a special purpose. A miracle is not related to the physical order in the sense that it is a putting right in it of something that does not work well in nature. It is concerned with a wholly different order of being, and is a manifestation of the Divine.

All through history, whether secular or religious, we find the assertion of the miraculous. It is simply a fact that God has from time to time manifested His Power, His Mercy, and His Goodness, by miracles not in one country alone, nor at one period only, but everywhere and always. During the whole course of the Old and of the New Testament narrative, viewed purely from the historical standpoint, miracles are constantly asserted to have taken place. It was not, as some writers have stated, only at particular epochs that they occurred, although they may be found clustered in greater numbers at some particular period. We find them occurring at least occasionally over the whole of the Old Testament period. The same assertion is true for the whole of the Apostolic and post-Apostolic times down to our own.

Here and now in the full blaze of modern progress and modern science, we have the occurrence of miracles. And yet there are

(41) \( \text{Cf.}^{\text{op. cit., 52.}} \)
found men who disbelieve, because with their own eyes they have not seen them, as though no human beings save themselves were true observers or reliable witnesses. There is no reason to believe that God cannot work miracles today in the twentieth century, if need arises, just as much as in the first century. God by His very nature is Changeless. He is and must be the same yesterday, today and forever. His care for His creatures is not in any way lessened.

Miracles are actually taking place in the world today particularly at Lourdes, a small town lying among the foot-hills of the Pyrenees almost on the borderland of Spain. The normal population of the town is about nine thousand, but there are, roughly speaking, an additional forty thousand visitors each week of the year.

Lourdes has manifested the miraculous element in the Catholic religion at a time during which contemporary thought was at about its lowest materialistic level, thus tending again to restore the miraculous element in Christianity to its proper place. It is, of course, true that Catholics have everywhere and always believed in the possibility of miracles; still, the fact has remained that whether they would or not, Catholics, especially those living among Protestants or materialists, have been unable entirely to escape from the effects of their environment, and although believing theoretically in the possibility of miracles, had almost come to believe that for all practical purposes in these days they had ceased to occur.(43)


During the last eighty years countless number of pilgrims have visited the town of Lourdes. These have themselves witnessed, or at least have heard from others of the marvelous occurrences at the Grotto. They have gone home with their faith in God strengthened and their influence in turn has been felt by many others who have never visited the place in person. Throughout this period these pilgrimages have been to the Catholic Church a veritable bulwark against the tendency to Rationalism and to the rejection of the supernatural. It is, indeed, scarcely impossible to exaggerate the affect which Lourdes has exercised in this direction.

Although Lourdes is the most popular place where miracles are occurring today, it is by no means the only place. Among other places miracles are occurring at the Shrine of St. Joseph in Montreal and at the Shrine of St. Anne, near Quebec City.

A very recent miracle occurred at the Basilica in Bohemia. The cure of Mrs. Marie Milotova, a millhand from Upice, Bohemia, is reported to have taken place June 1, 1940. At that time the event was kept secret pending investigation and examination by several surgeons. In 1937, while working in a spinning mill, Mrs. Milotova injured her knee so badly that, despite medical attention in various hospitals, her leg became "dead", insensitive to touch, pain, heat or cold. The leg was fitted with an orthopedic brace but Marie could walk only with the help of

crutches or with the support of another person.

When all human help failed, Marie wanted to go to Lourdes, but she could not afford the trip. She procured water from the Lourdes fountain and began to use it on January 1, 1940. At the same time she began a Novena to the Blessed Virgin of Svata Hora (the "Holy Mountain" near Pribam, Bohemia). On June 8, 1940, she traveled to the Svata Hora Basilica, where she went to Confession. On the following day, she received Communion in the Basilica, after which, with the aid of her companion, she sat down on the stone steps before the altar of Our Lady of Perpetual Succor. There she recited the Rosary to finish her Novena.

While Maria was saying the Rosary, a metal spring on her leg brace came loose and fell on the floor. At the same moment, Maria felt that her leg was "alive". Soon there was no doubt about the leg's being normal again. The brace was removed, and Marie began to walk normally. She now has complete use of the limb.

Let us now cite another instance of a miraculous cure which happened recently.

This is the unusual cure wrought on a young woman at a leper colony on one of the Virgin Islands. The young woman, entombed in her own dying flesh, pondered daily, "Why did this happen to me?" She, a non-Catholic, finally asked the priest-chaplain the perplexing question, "Why am I stricken with leprosy?" The priest drew from his pocket a crucifix and placed it in the

girls' hands, saying: "There is the only Person who has a philosophy of pain...." Soon the young woman was received into the true Church, and when she received her First Communion, she burst forth with the strange expression: "Thank God I am a leper, because through it I received the gift of the Catholic faith."

Devotions were held weekly in the leper chapel in honor of Our Lady of Perpetual Help, and one of the most popular requests was a return to good health. But no cure was sought by this girl. Nevertheless, Our Lady rewarded the girl for her magnificent profession of faith. The young woman was cleansed completely of her contagion and once more the glow of health was placed upon her cheeks. The doctors were amazed, but they put the official stamp of approval on the cure. The gates of the colony swung open and the girl who had exclaimed, "Thank God, I am a leper," went forth free to mingle with society—another modern miracle to confound a doubting world.

CONCLUSION

In this thesis we have delved into the question of the miraculous. We have pointed out certain erroneous attitudes towards miracles in our own day and we have criticized these attitudes. We have seen the true nature of miracles and their classification. We have shown that miracles are not only possible, but that they are highly probable and that we can have a true knowledge of them, i.e., that we can know miracles as true events both on the score of their historical truth as true happenings and on the score of their philosophical truth as truly miraculous happenings. On examining individual miraculous events we have seen them comply with the requirements of what has been laid down as necessary for a miracle; and lastly, the continuance of miracles down to our own day has been proved by indisputable examples.

Human reason sees God in His providential way interested in and caring for humanity. Human reason sees God doing this not only by Divine Concurrence but from time to time also by miraculous intervention in the affairs of the world—a affairs which become sordid only when man forgets his Creator. The realistic philosopher is carried by his reason up to the very Being of God whether he considers ordinary things in the world or extraordinary things. At a time when certain groups—Communists, Nazis, Fascists—are endeavoring to build an entirely natural order based on ordinary elements, i.e. force and selfishness, would that all would heed the extraordinary manifestations of the God of all Being.


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