WILL WONDERS NEVER CEASE?

The Place of Miracles in the Christian Faith

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ABSTRACT

In the eighteenth century miracles were appealed to as a major proof of the authenticity of Christianity. The advancement of science in the next century reversed that and forced Christian apologists to defend the very possibility of miracles themselves. The presupposition of belief in miracles is belief in God. If God is active in the world, the manifestation of his power in unexpected ways is very possible. But Christian miracles are not merely sensational acts; their proper context is faith and the glory of God. Yet some Christians have attempted to have faith without miracles, even reducing the resurrection to merely a symbolic truth not a physical fact. However, to remove the miraculous, especially the resurrection, from the New Testament flies in the face of the clear affirmation of the apostolic witness. Today a large section of conservative Christians do not simply defend the possibility of miracles, they proclaim their continuing presence in the church's worship and mission. Signs, wonders and miracles, they affirm, are the powerful means of Christian evangelism. Christians are divided today over the definition (is speaking in tongues a miracle?), role and frequency of miracles; but there is agreement among conservative Christians that God has acted, and is active, in our world.

INTRODUCTION

A friend and I were travelling down from Wiluna to Kalgoorlie in West Australia. It was a very rough road, full of corrugation and other hazards, and my Austin-Healey sports car was not built for such terrain. Suddenly I lost control and veered off into the bush. Examination showed that we'd sheered the high tensile studs that secured the steering arm to the back plate of one of the front wheels. The car was undrivable; we were stranded. The road was isolated with no sign of other traffic. We were miles from Leonora, the nearest township. Disconsolate, my friend and I sat down in despair at our lonely predicament.

By late afternoon no traffic had come by; we were pretty dejected. I had just become a Christian, so silently I tried what was new for me. I prayed for God's help. A little later, to our delight, we saw the dust of an approaching vehicle—the first we'd seen all day. They were Baptist missionaries. One was a medical

doctor, who, prior to doing medicine, had been a motor mechanic. He was carrying a full tool kit. He soon removed the damaged part. The group then gave us a lift into Leonora and took us to the town's electricity generating plant. The engineer there removed the broken studs and replaced them with new ones. He then ran us back out to our car and re-assembled the steering linkage. He refused any payment, even for his petrol. The odds against finding expert assistance in such a remote place must be enormous. I felt at the time that I'd experienced a miracle.

Recently I made a promotional video to help in fund-raising. I had assistance from a cameraman and a film editor, who naturally expected payment for their services. I had no budget for the project. Months earlier a businessman had made a casual promise over lunch to help me financially if I made a promotional video. An hour after the cameraman and editor put in their invoice to me for $1940, I went to collect my mail. Among the mail I noted an envelope with some business logo on the front. Thinking it was junk mail, I almost threw it away unopened. On opening it I discovered a cheque for $2000 from the businessman. He'd honoured what had been a casual remark. The $60 extra allowed me to buy a dozen copies of the tape for personal distribution. Was it a miracle or a coincidence? But then, as Bishop William Temple noted, when we stop praying the coincidences stop happening.

BARRIERS TO BELIEF IN MIRACLES

Over There and Sometime Else

But my two experiences were not the dramatic disruptions of nature where the dead come to life, storms cease on command, the lame walk and the blind see, or seas part and suns stand still. We don't see these things in our own town, in our own home, or in our own life.[1] One can be forgiven the sneaking feeling that miracles seem more prevalent in ancient times or in societies without the insights of modern science. This was the third objection that the sceptical Scottish philosopher, David Hume (1711-76), raised against miracles: 'it forms a strong presumption against all supernatural and miraculous relations, that they are observed chiefly to abound among ignorant and barbarous nations'.[2] If a more civilised nation gives credence to miracles, he goes on to argue, it is because it received them from 'ignorant and barbarous ancestors'. Hume's restriction of miracles to primitive societies has been widely accepted. Even in Christian circles, the occurrence of miracles tends to be limited to ancient times or to the mission field. But is the

problem of a lack of miracles in western cultures due to a lack of faith, or to a lack of an ability to see them when they occur?

Could Modern Persons Recognise a Miracle If One Happened in Their Presence?

Those of us who live in western cultures tend to look for natural rather than supernatural explanations for most of the events in our society and personal experience. This is what Father Malachy discovered when he tried to bring about faith by performing a miracle. Malachy prayed that God would transport the city's dance-hall, including all the dancers, miraculously to an island off the coast. God cooperated with his devoted servant and the miracle happened; but Malachy's hopes that this would bring the city to faith were sadly dashed. His best efforts to convince the township that God had done this amazing event at his request failed because the citizens were open to only naturalistic explanations.[3]

The people immediately attempted to explain the extraordinary event of a dance-hall being transported off shore to Bass Rock on the basis of purely natural causes. Marshall's story certainly raises the issue whether modern secularists could recognise a miracle even if one occurred in their presence. Naturalistic pre-suppositions would prejudice their analysis of the most amazing events; and by its very character, naturalism would exclude God from all of them.

The ability to recognise a miracle depends very much on one's world view.[4] Left to itself, nature on the whole behaves quite predictably, though allowance must be made for the unexpected and the surprising. For the theist, however, 'if God is God, and if God is the author of nature, then occasionally—when it suits his purpose—we might have to reckon with God's doing things that we had never seen before'.[5] If there is no God, then there are no miracles; but if there is a God, then nothing in nature makes miracles impossible.

Miracles of course cannot be used to prove the existence of God, since how we understand God is the means by which we interpret the miraculous. Miracles offer 'proof' of God more in the manner of a forensic scientist's evidence: if God is interactive with his creation, and if he is benevolent towards it, then miracles are possible, even likely.[6] Miracles are consistent with the proposal that God has control over the universe and is involved in its processes; it does not of course prove it beyond reasonable doubt.[7]

Christian faith in God is not based on the evidence of miracles. The reason most of us accept theism over atheism has to do with a belief

in human dignity, an acceptance of the validity of human rational processes, and a desire for meaning and human values. Jesus himself refused to perform miracles on demand as proofs of his person or ministry (Matt 12.38-42). For false Christs can offer miracles as proofs (Mark 13.21-22). Miracles are simply indirect proofs, that is, consistent phenomena *given* who Jesus was and why he was sent: 'His miracles were not propaganda staged to attract a crowd. He was not a magician but the miracle worker sent from God in fulfillment of prophecy'.[8] Hence miracles for the Christian cannot be seen simply as a mechanism to get us out of philosophical trouble. They relate to the gospel: 'it is better to define miracle as an extraordinary physical event in the present world which witnesses to the coming (and some cases arrival) of the future world'.[9] But are such extraordinary physical events scientifically possible?

Miracles and the Laws of Physics

What then is a miracle? 'A miracle' said Hume, 'is a violation of nature'.[10] He then argues that it is experience that gives authority both to human testimony and to the laws of nature. Testimony affirming a miracle, he argued, would contradict our *experience* that nature is uniform. Which is to be preferred? The experience of human testimony, or the experience of the constancy of nature? We cannot affirm both in the case of a miracle, for a miracle, as Hume defined it, was a violation of nature. We know by experience that human testimony is fallible and deceptive whereas, in Hume's opinion, our experience is that nature is reliable. Therefore, concludes Hume, 'no human testimony can have such force as to prove a miracle'.[11]

The major problem for Hume is that his faith in the uniformity of nature is based on human experience—an experience that is limited. The 200 years of human experience that has occurred since Hume's death has certainly revealed some quirks in nature beyond Hume's strait-jacketed uniformity. The mechanistic universe of Newtonian physics with its predictable relationships operates at only one level (and a macro one at that) of existence, and 'every level of description is needed in our effort to do justice to the rich and varied process of the world, in its nature both flexible and reliable - including the category of divine providence'.[12] And 'the miraculous is simply the providential in unusual circumstances'.[13]

Richard Purtill's definition of miracle avoids Hume's more hostile approach: 'a miracle as an event in which God temporarily makes an

exception to the natural order of things, to show that God is acting'.[14] This does not mean that God is not acting within the ordinary affairs of life; a miracle is simply where God shows his hand.

Christian theism asserts that God is separate and above the world (against pantheism) and is totally involved in the world (against deism).[15] Hence, it can be misleading, if the distinction between natural and supernatural excludes God's involvement in the ordinary events of our lives. 'God's total involvement in the world requires that miracles be recognised, not as evidence that God is acting where he does not normally act, but as indications that he is acting in ways, and for purposes, that are different from normal.'[16] We must be careful lest we look for God only in the miraculous and fail to see him in the wonders of a sunset or in a mother's love.

Hence it is the **mode** not the **fact** of God's activity that is different. Poole suggests ordinary/extraordinary rather than natural/supernatural to describe the different ways God interacts with the world. This does not mean all events are miraculous. It means that God's presence is not limited to the inexplicable phenomena of nature; he is also present in the ordinary events and affairs of life.[17]

Science tends to be considerably more humble in its claims today than it sometimes was in the past. Many scientists today recognise the limits and fallibility of their discipline. Science accepts the universal validity of the laws of physics; it can tell us little about the framer of those laws, the first Physicist. As the theoretical physicist, Paul Davies, frankly observes: 'Having insisted that everything in the world can be explained rationally in terms of natural laws, when it comes to the origin of the laws themselves a mental backflip is performed: the system of laws must simply be accepted as a brute fact. The laws exist reasonlessly, [atheists] say. So at rock bottom, the universe is absurd'.[18]

The glaring contradiction here for those who deny a theistic creation, as Davies notes, is that it grounds the rationality which science uses to understand the universe in cosmic absurdity.[19] Obviously if God is found to be unnecessary for the origins of the ordered universe, then there is no deity around to interact with the operation of any of the laws of physics. Conversely, if the wisdom of God is considered the indispensable ingredient to provide the universe with meaning and rationality, and to give us minds with which to discern the maths of nature, then extraordinary activity by God in the world cannot

be debarred on logical or even empirical grounds.

Faith and Miracles

Some Christians today believe that the paucity of miracles in many churches is due not to science but to a lack of faith. They are convinced that Christian unbelief is the only barrier to miracles happening today. Even Jesus, such advocates note, could not perform miracles in Nazareth because of the people's unbelief (Matt 13.58; Mark 6.1-6). Earnest prayer is the means of expelling the 'deaf and dumb spirit', we are assured (Mark 9.25, 29). Other Christians see these stories as highlighting the unique powers of Jesus rather than teaching what is possible for all believers to do.

The authority to heal the sick, to raise the dead, to cast out demons that Jesus granted to his disciples (Matt 10.1, 8) may be just as restricted to that group as was the charge for them to 'go nowhere among the Gentiles (v. 5). Appeal to Mark 16.17-18 as providing a mandate for Christians to perform miracles must be set aside as this passage is not widely found in the Greek manuscript tradition. Great care must be taken before asserting that the miracles that occurred at the inception of Christianity must be replicated in the Christian communities today.

Miracles and Justice

The biggest problem facing belief in miracles is not their possibility, but their fairness. It's natural for a mother whose child survived a bus accident to thank God for his mercy in sparing her child's life. But what about the other children who died? Are miracles capricious? Sir Nevill Mott frankly rejects a God who would give us the miracle of the Virgin birth and then allow the black death or the holocaust.[20] His solution is to deny the occurrence of miracles. But Christianity without the miraculous is not historically valid; the early witness of the apostles was centred in the miraculous.[21]

Yet it must be admitted that on the surface it does seem unfair that one is delivered by a miracle, while another just as worthy case dies alone and in terrible pain. There is no entirely satisfactory answer to this concern, though the Book of Job is helpful. One thing is certain: blaming the ill or the intercessor for lack of faith or decrying the church for its apathy is unhelpful. Miracles are rare events and it would be disastrous were it otherwise. The expectation of endless miracles can only lead to disillusionment or triviality (God finds lost watches, but has no interest in preventing natural disasters) or even injustice (God heals a stiff back while another dies because of a tumour).[22]

God's interface with the world is obviously complex. Why miracles occur in some cases and not in others which seem equally deserving must be because the pattern within which God is operating his purposes is present in one instant and not in the other. Professor John Polkinghorne argues 'mere wonderworking, without an underlying consistency of action and intent, would never be a credible Christian miracle'.[23] He goes on to say that miracles occur within consistent circumstances which are rare in any one person's experience. Miracles then are purposeful within the divine program and are never arbitrary, capricious or simply a matter of chance. The role of miracles in the life of Jesus makes this clear.

THE PURPOSE OF MIRACLES

We do well to remind ourselves of the role of the miracles in the Gospels. As Johnson bluntly puts it, 'Jesus did not work miracles merely to make life better'.[24] Then why did he perform them? The Gospel miracles play a similar role to the parables. 'The miracles are to Jesus' actions what the parables are to his teaching: messages or puzzles that require interpretation'.[25] Any miracle can always be interpreted as the result of other action than the divine.[26] And even if one accepts a supernatural cause, that does not mean that one has rightly interpreted the miracle. Miracles invite our inquiry about Jesus; their purpose is to lead us to repentance, to a change of lifestyle and to faith in him as the Son of God.[27] 'The miracle-stories. . . confront us with the question whether the power of God was or was not revealed in the person and work of Jesus Christ. They compel us to say Yes or No'.[28] Thus the Gospel miracles cannot be seen in isolation as if their only purpose was the compassionate relief of suffering (though of course it was that). There is the deeper meaning about God's presence in Jesus and a hope for the future.

The miracles, like the parables, invite the true seeker to inquire, 'who then is this man?' (Mark 4.41). This is why John refers to the miracles as 'signs', because they point beyond themselves to Christ (John 2.11; 4.54; 6.14; 12.37; 20.30)—'Jesus of Nazareth, a man attested to you by God with mighty works and wonders and signs'(Acts 2.22). Miracles open up the possibility of faith as well as scepticism. One contemporary religious group sourced Jesus' powers in the demonic (Mark 3.20-29). Thus even in Jesus' own day his miracles brought reactions of unbelief as powerfully as reactions of faith. Of no miracle is this truer than the resurrection.[29]

THE MIRACLE OF MIRACLES

As early as 51 C. E. we find Paul writing of Jesus' resurrection from the dead: 'to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead—Jesus, who rescues us from the coming wrath' (1 Thess 1.10). Obviously Paul himself had come to this belief some time earlier around 34 C. E., and he was by no means the first Christian believer (Rom 16.7). So belief in Christ's resurrection did not evolve slowly after his death, but was an immediate and crucial part of the Christian message from the beginning. Something was the basis for this conviction, but what?

The sceptical explanation is the suggestion that the resurrection belief arose from some kind of a mistake, or worse, a deliberate deception. There are a number of such hypotheses.

1. The women went to the wrong tomb.
2. Unknown to the disciples themselves, some independent person removed the body.
3. The disciples themselves removed the body and invented the whole story.
4. The disciples saw not the real Jesus, but hallucinations.
5. Jesus did not actually die on the cross, but was resuscitated, or in some other way survived.[30]

Theories 1-3 above are attempts to explain the evidence of Jesus' empty tomb. All four Gospels refer to the empty tomb, and Paul's writings imply it (Matt 28.6; Mark 16.6; Luke 24.5; John 20.2; 1 Cor 15.4).[31] Hence the datum of the empty tomb was an integral part of the belief in the bodily resurrection of Jesus and not a later explanatory addition.[32] The fact that the empty tomb is mentioned only in passing and as initially causing consternation tends to support the view that it was not purposefully created for apologetic purposes.

Since the tomb belonged to the family of Joseph of Arimathea, its location would have been well known or easily ascertainable. If Jesus' body remained where it was originally placed, then the authorities could have quickly terminated the excitement over Jesus' resurrection by producing the body. The idea that the disciples stole the body is as old as Matthew's Gospel (28.13). The moral behaviour of the disciples is not consistent with perpetrators of a fraud. More importantly, they died for their faith, whereas hoaxers don't die for a confidence trick.

The empty tomb tradition demonstrates that the resurrection is about something that happened to Jesus and was not simply a spiritual experience of the disciples. It also affirms that there is identity

or continuity between the person who died and the person who was raised.[33] And finally it distinguishes the Christian hope of the resurrection of the body from the Greek view of the immortality of an immaterial soul.

Theories 4-5, as listed above, attempt to discount the historicity of Jesus' post-resurrection appearances. Obviously if people truly saw Jesus physically alive after he had certainly died, then his resurrection is a reasonable conclusion. Various disciples, both as individuals and as large groups, at different times and in diverse places experienced appearances of Jesus after his crucifixion. This is not the pattern of hallucination. The appearances of Jesus to his followers were tangible and profound in their practical effect. The disillusioned and cowering disciples were transformed into witnesses who boldly declared to the highest court that they 'cannot help speaking about what [they] have seen and heard' (Acts 4.20).

The suggestion that Jesus somehow survived the cross, itself highly unlikely, is really an implausible explanation for a belief in Jesus' resurrection. A beaten, half-dead Jesus, desperately in need of medical attention, is hardly a probable cause for faith in him as the Conqueror of death and the source of eternal life.

The independent strands of the empty tomb and the post-mortem appearances of Jesus, which are not easily explained away, are at the very minimum, consistent with the deep conviction of the New Testament writers that God had raised Jesus from the dead.[34] As Paul put it: 'regarding his Son, who as to his human nature was a descendant of David, and who through the Spirit of holiness was declared with power to be the Son of God by his resurrection from the dead: Jesus Christ our Lord' (Rom 1.3-4).

We are really left with only one alternative: either the miracle of Jesus' resurrection created the apostles' faith, as they claimed, or their faith created the story of the resurrection, as the critics assert. But if this latter were true, we'd be left with the insoluble puzzle as to what created their faith in the first place.[35]

MIRACLES TODAY

Most if not all conservative Christians accept the resurrection miracle, even if they debate the nature of the event, but not all accept the validity of the gift of working miracles. Currently among conservative Christians there is a debate raging over whether the church today should be experiencing the same kind of miracles that are recorded in the New Testament.[36] Evangelical Christians who see their tradition

in terms of the sixteenth-century reformers (Luther, Calvin)—though not denying the occurrence today of the occasional supernatural event—tend to limit miracles to crucial periods in biblical history (eg the Exodus, time of Elijah, the era of Jesus). Other Evangelicals, whose roots are in the Wesleyan-Charismatic tradition, are adamant that Christians should expect miracles (especially of healing) constantly to occur in their midst. What does the New Testament teach about miracles?

Are the Apostolic Miracles for Today?

Miracles in the New Testament are not performed by believers in general, but are restricted to the apostles and prophetic leaders. People, including believers, bring their sick to the apostles to be healed (Acts 5.12-16; 9.36-42). Just as miracles testified to Jesus as a man from God (John 3.2), so also signs attested the message of the apostles (2 Cor 12.12; Heb 2.3-4; Gal 3.5). 'Signs and wonders' then concentrate at certain crucial turning points in the history of salvation and are performed by divinely appointed leaders within the movement. The establishment of the gospel of Jesus was such a crucial time and the apostles and such individuals as Stephen (Acts 6.8) and Philip (Acts 8.6) were the specially chosen bearers of the message. Apostles are included in the list of the gifts of the Spirit (1 Cor 12.28-29; Eph 4.11); since that office does not continue into the church age, it must be asked whether the other gifts continue unabated.

Given the restriction of miracles to crucial times in biblical history and to chosen persons, it is perilous to assert that Christians today should be performing all the miracles found in the Book of Acts. Although 1 Cor 12.28 seems to refer to church members in general, we should note that apostles and prophets are in the list and may be the ones designated as 'workers of miracles'. Whatever, this solitary text hardly supports the spectacle of thousands attending a great rally in the hope of healing by some charismatic healer. Such healing campaigns seem foreign to the ethos of the New Testament.

Charismatic Claims

Various writers of the Charismatic-Third Wave persuasion have documented modern miracles.[37] David C. Lewis, a Cambridge University social anthropologist followed up attendees at a John Wimber conference on healing. One cure involved a baby with an incurable cancer (infantile fibrosarcoma). The baby was healed after much prayer. The consultant classified it as spontaneous remission, though research by

Lewis failed to find any previous cases of this type of cancer going into remission.[38] Another amazing case examined by Lewis was the cure of Rebecca. Rebecca was nine years old and had been diagnosed as nerve deaf, surgically beyond medical help. When she was healed after prayer, the consultant at first could not believe that the little girl had completely recovered her hearing.[39]

Geoff and Hope Price have also assembled numerous accounts of modern miracles.[40] Many of these naturally take the form of testimonials. Even if we were to place some of these miracles in the category of the kind of sensational events served up by TV programs such as 'That's Incredible' or 'PSI Factor', a Christian cannot dismiss all such testimonies out of hand. The Christian world-view allows for the miraculous. But the Christian world-view does not permit an attitude that demands miracles. Miracles occur as God sees fit, not as humans dictate.

The belief that miracles must continue so as to attest the power of the gospel is fraught with dangers. Philip Yancey refers to a Christian community that believed faith alone could heal any disease without medical intervention. Among the group death during childbirth was eight times the national average and their children died at a rate three times higher than elsewhere in the USA.[41] And this was despite a healthy rural environment. Zealous early Adventists had similar tragic experiences.[42]

There is general agreement among Evangelical Christians that the purpose of miracles is to attest authority or to awaken faith. Yet it is also obvious that a surfeit of miracles or the keen anticipation of the miraculous can be destructive of faith. Yancey gives examples of people who lost their faith when the expected miracle did not happen.[43] In dealing with the miraculous we need to practise open caution.

CONCLUSION

The Christian today faces two extremes regarding the issue of miracles. On the one hand, scepticism (often appealing to science for validation) denies the very possibility of miracles: we know from experience that people don't rise from the dead, therefore Jesus didn't rise from the dead—end of discussion.[44] Whereas on the other hand, charismatic Christians claim that in their ministries miracles descend in an avalanche. Is there a middle road?

If one grants that there is a quantitative difference between the founding period of the Christian faith and the church today, then we should not expect the same concentration of miracles to occur

now as they did then. What church attendees want above all else is not spiritual fireworks or sensational manifestations of the Spirit. What they want is a profound sense of the presence of God in their worship and in their lives. And that may best be achieved through 'the word of faith' (Rom 10.8) rather than by a weekly dose of signs, wonders and miracles.

Yet Christians cannot and do not deny the miraculous. The Christian faith is founded on a series of grand miracles (the incarnation, the atonement and the resurrection), and lives in the hope of another (the second advent). It would be almost deistic to assert that God works no miracles in between these events. Yet we are wise if while adopting an open approach, we remain cautious in our claims. We should not feel our faith is a vain waste of time if we have never personally experienced a miracle—other than those little coincidence-miracles that infest the life of a believer.[45]

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. How would you describe a miracle?
2. If as a charity worker you received a large donation of just the right amount an hour after the account had arrived (as actually happened to the author), would you see God's hand in it? Is it a miracle?
3. If the Gospel miracles are intimately related to the incarnational presence of Jesus, should we as Christians expect to be able to do miracles like raising the dead?
4. Is it possible to accept the scientific view of the world and still believe in the miraculous, that is, to believe in events which nature, if left to herself, could (would?) not produce?
5. How should we understand this promise of Jesus? 'Truly, truly, I say to you, he who believes in me will also do the works that I do; and greater works than these will he do, because I go to the Father' (RSV). Are the 'greater works' miracles or are they the works of belief in God (John 6.29)?

ENDNOTES

[1] This demand is echoed in Luke 4.23: Jesus said to them, "Surely you will quote this proverb to me: 'Physician, heal yourself! Do here in your hometown what we have heard that you did in Capernaum.'"

[2] David Hume, 'Of Miracles', section ten of *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding* (originally published in 1748).

[3] Bruce Marshall, *Father Malachy's Miracle* (Glasgow: Collins/Fontana, 1962). In a similar vein the Bishop

of Durham opinions that even if the Shroud of Turin could be proved to come from the first century and be the imprint of a crucified man whose body was photo-dynamically transformed, few would thereby be brought to believe in 'the reality, love and availability of the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ' (David E. Jenkins, *God, Miracle and the Church of England* [London: SCM, 1987], 30-31).

[4] Winfried Corduan, 'Recognizing a Miracle', in R. Douglas Geivett and Gary R. Habermas (eds.), *In Defence of Miracles: A Comprehensive Case for God's Action in History* (Leicester: Apollos, 1997) 99-111.

[5] Colin Brown, *That You May Believe: Miracles and Faith Then and Now* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1985) 32.

[6] This is the opinion of the geneticist, Professor R. J. Berry, who speaks of miracles as an unpredictable but inevitable result of God's involvement with the world; see R. J. Berry, 'What I Believe about Miracles', *Nature* 322 (24 July, 1986) 322.

[7] Notice how Jesus prefaces his claim in Luke 11.20 with a conditional clause: But *if* I drive out demons by the finger of God, then the kingdom of God has come to you.

[8] David H. Johnson, 'Preaching the Miracle Stories of the Synoptic Gospels', *Trinity Journal* 18NS (1997) 91.

[9] Johnson, 'Preaching the Miracle Stories', 93.

[10] Hume, 'Of Miracles'.

[11] Hume, 'Of Miracles'.

[12] John Polkinghorne, *Science and Providence: God's Interaction with the World* (Boston: Shambhala, 1989), 29.

[13] Ibid., 25.

[14] Richard L. Purtill, 'Defining Miracles', in Geivett and Habermas (eds.), *In Defence of Miracles*, 62-63.

[15] Deism believes that after creating the world, God removed himself and does not interfere with the laws of nature.

[16] Michael Poole, *Miracles, Science, the Bible & Experience* (London: Scripture Union, 1992) 22.

[17] Francis Bacon put it cogently: 'Miracles were not given to refute atheism, God's ordinary works do that' (quoted by Poole, *Miracles*, 36).

[18] Paul Davies, 'The Future of God', *Sydney Morning Herald*. 21 December, 1996.

[19] 'Yet physics is powerless to explain its own founding faith in the mathematical intelligence of the world....The natural way to explain why the reason within and the reason without fit together so perfectly would be if they had a common origin in a deeper rationality' (John Polkinghorne, 'A Scientist's View of Religion', *Science & Christian Belief* 2 [1990] 87).

[20] Sir Nevill Mott, 'Christianity without Miracles', in Sir Nevill Mott (ed.) *Can Scientists Believe: Some Examples of the Attitude of*

Scientists to Religion (London: James & James, 1991) 5.

[21] The attempt is often made to interpret the miracles spiritually and ethically so that the historicity of the miracle is downplayed or denied, see H. J. Richards, *The Miracles of Jesus: What Really Happened?* (Glasgow: Collins/ Fontana, 1975).

[22] See David Larson, 'The Moral Danger of Miracles', *Spectrum* 18 (April, 1988) 13-18.

[23] Polkinghorne, *Science and Providence*, 52.

[24] Johnson,'Preaching the Miracle Stories', 93.

[25] Christopher D. Marshall, *Faith as a Theme in Mark's Narrative* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989) 60.

[26] The Jerusalem scribes attributed Jesus' powers to Be-el'zebul, the demons' leader. Moderns may find natural explanations for miraculous phenomena.

[27] 'The miracles in Mark's story, then, are dramatic parables which refer beyond themselves to the manifestation of God's kingly power in Jesus and to its radical implications for those who respond to its demands. Like the spoken parables, the miracles are only complete when those who witness them move beyond the external occurrence to grasp the deeper significance of the kingdom's coming and its concomitant demand for conversion and belief' (Marshall, *Faith as a Theme*, 64).

[28] Alan Richardson, *The Miracle-Stories of the Gospels* (London: SCM, 1941) 126.

[29] The virgin birth of Jesus has also been questioned; see John Shelby Spong, *Born of a Woman: A Bishop Rethinks the Birth of Jesus* (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1992).

[30] Ian Wilson, *Jesus: The Evidence* (London: Pan Books, 1984/85) 117. Once the historical truth of the Gospels is doubted, imagination has no boundaries. For example, a Japanese version has Jesus' brother, Iskiri, substitute for him on the cross. Jesus escaped via Siberia and Alaska and settled in Shingo, Japan. There he married a local girl, Yumiko, raised a family and died at the good age of 106 years. His grave is there, so the locals believe, to this day (*Sydney Morning Herald*, July 26, 1995).

[31] The variations in the Gospel accounts of the events on the resurrection morning are often cited as proof of the legendary nature of the resurrection. Even so, the Gospels are amazingly united in the basic facts of the resurrection events. Furthermore, a fabricated story would normally avoid such discrepancies.

[32] W. L. Craig, 'The Empty Tomb of Jesus', in Geivett and Habermas (eds.), *In Defence of Miracles*, 247-61.

[33] This does not mean the resurrection body of Jesus was altogether continuous with his incarnational body; see Murray J. Harris, *From Grave to Glory* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1990). For a denial of a physical resurrection while affirming a spiritual

continuity see John Shelby Spong, *Resurrection - Myth or Reality?* (San Francisco: Harper, 1994).

[34] Francis J. Beckwith, 'History and Miracles', in Geivett and Habermas (eds.), *In Defence of Miracles*, 86-98.

[35] It is gratifying to see sixteen British scientists (including ten Professors, the Director-General of the Meteorological Office, the Director of Kew Gardens, and the Secretary of the International Whaling Commission) testify of their confidence in science and their faith in Christ, including the miracles; see R. J. Berry (ed.), *Real Science, Real Faith: Sixteen Leading British Scientists Discuss their Science and their Personal Faith* (Eastbourne: Monarch, 1991). In contrast New Testament scholarship seems to be plagued with raging doubt; see 'Can We Still Believe in Miracles?' *Time (Australia)* (August 7, 1995) 54-61.

[36] Robert Doyle (ed.), *Signs and Wonders and Evangelicals: A Response to the Teaching of John Wimber* (Sydney: Lancer, 1987); Gary S. Greig and Kevin N. Springer (eds), *The Kingdom and the Power: Are Healing and the Spiritual Gifts used by Jesus and the Early Church Meant for the Church Today?* (Ventura, CA: Regal Books, 1993); Wayne A. Grudem (ed.), *Are Miraculous Gifts for Today? Four Views* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1996).

[37] The movement that emphasises the renewing power of the Holy Spirit in the modern church is usually viewed as having three distinct 'waves'. The first called the Pentecostal wave dates from 1901 with its stress on baptism in the Holy Spirit and speaking in tongues; second, the Charismatic which flourished in the 1960s and 1970s and crossed denominational boundaries by seeking to practise all the gifts of the Spirit and laying less stress on speaking in tongues; finally the Third Wave which encourages all believers to use spiritual gifts today in the proclamation of the gospel. They claim that evangelism should ordinarily be accompanied by signs, wonders and miracles. The Third Wave calls this 'power evangelism'.

[38] David C. Lewis, 'A Social Anthropologist's Analysis of Contemporary Healing', *The Kingdom and the Power*, 326.

[39] 'A Social Anthropologist's Analysis', 323-4.

[40] Geoff and Hope Price, *Miracles: True Stories of How God Acts Today* (London: Macmillan, 1995).

[41] Philip Yancey, *Disappointed with God: Three Questions No One Asks Aloud* (New York: Harper, 1988) 15-16.

[42] Larson, 'The Moral Danger of Miracles', 13-18.

[43] *Disappointed with God*, 11-36.

[44] Alister McGrath, *Bridge-Building: Effective Christian Apologetics* (Leicester: IVP, 1992) 164.

[45] One's conversion and transformation may of course be classified as a miracle.