

Editorial - Miracles and Science

The question of miracles in an age of science and scepticism was recently highlighted on that popular television program, Ballykissangel, when a young cleric who had been involved in the ministry of 'miracles' and the 'laying on of hands' in the local parish was reprimanded by his senior priest for disturbing the community. He was told that the 'modern church does not deal in such things' and that he should 'keep his hands to himself'. Are miracles genuine happenings, or forms of trickery designed to get attention? Are they sheer coincidences of nature or incidences wrought by God's intervention? Dr Norman Young, Senior Lecturer in New Testament at Avondale College, looks at these questions in our feature article. Feature articles are not always in a position to provide iron-clad answers to our questions but they are designed to help us think through the issues christianly and provide a basis for discussion and spiritual growth. The reader is reminded that perplexity can enhance spiritual growth rather than diminish it if our Lord remains the focus of our discussions. Take time to read through and reflect on the questions at the conclusion of the feature article. You might like to use the questions as a basis for a

bible study discussion or a vespers cottage meeting.

The Christian Church appears to relate to miracles in at least three ways. One part wholeheartedly embraces the belief that miracles are an important dynamic of the modern church; others regard miracles as mythical inventions of the past and attempt to provide naturalistic explanations for the recorded miracles in scripture; and others embrace the idea of miracles for the early Christian Church but view them as an isolated phenomenon in the modern church. The two book reviews in this volume provide two of these different perspectives on miracles which you should find interesting. The book by Geoff and Hope Price gives an account of miracles in today's church and that by John Polkinghorne provides insight into God's providence from the perspective of one who is a scientist and a priest.

Finally, this series should be thought of as a form of Christian dialogue rather than as a prescription of belief. We encourage students to express their ideas on a topic and have included some student responses to the question of miracles in this volume. While Avondale College has a conservative Christian heritage it seeks to

explore ways in which that heritage can be expressed to give insight relevant to the current needs of our world. We hope you find this first

volume helpful in this regard.

Dr Kevin deBerg

Director of ACISS and Editor

Students have their say about miracles.

Students were asked to respond to two questions relating to miracles.

First Question: Are miracles believable in an age of science or are they mystical relics from the past?

Response 1: Yes, miracles are as believable now as in Jesus' day. However, science can explain how some miracles happen-but not why they happen.

Response 2: Yes, I believe miracles are possible in this age. Life is a miracle in itself. Not all miracles are enshrouded in an air of mysticism. Some are just everyday occurrences that bring relief to people. For example, I had \$2.80 to buy food for a week. I walked into my room and there was a \$50 note lying on my desk. To me, that's an example of a miracle. There was no way I could have known that someone was going to give me the money just when I needed it.

Response 3: Miracles are believable in an age of science as there are some areas that science can't reach but miracles can. Perhaps we need to have more faith in order for more miracles to happen.

Response 4: Yes, miracles are believable in this age of science as I have seen God work miracles in my life and in the lives of my family and friends. We are walking miracles. God is beyond science and concrete evidence. He is greater as He made science. Miracles happen today too.

Response 5: I believe they are-God hasn't changed but man's faith has. There are plenty of miracles today but people are more sceptical and don't give God the credit. I think science is trying to explain away the work of God in some areas and people are probably more inclined to give science the credit if they are lacking in faith. I have experienced miracles of my own. God has pulled me out of a very destructive drug addiction, given me new life and healed my body from sickness.

Second Question: Are miracles important to contemporary Christian Faith or were they important only for the first century Christian Church?

Response 1: Still important, but not essential to Christian Faith. Miracles can be very small and very personalised for a Christian. Big

miracles happen too but tend to be unnoticed in our society as we try to explain it in other ways.

Response 2: I believe miracles are important for everyone. Everyone needs something to believe in. Seeing God leading in my life helps my faith in Him to grow.

Response 3: I think perhaps they were needed more at that time to establish the authenticity of the church and the power of God. On the other hand, perhaps we need them more today to reassure others that Jesus is real.

Response 4: Yes, miracles are important to contemporary Christian Faith and not just in the past. However, they are not a prerequisite or a determining factor

for our salvation. Miracles are important as they strengthen our faith in an explicit, demonstrable way, yet if you don't experience miracles, it doesn't mean you aren't a "good" Christian or that God isn't evident in your life. God doesn't have to prove himself to us for us to believe in him. On the other hand, we shouldn't limit God-what He wants to do and can do in our lives is limitless.

Response 5: The church today is probably more likely to turn to science/psychology/human wisdom to solve problems and hence there is little room for God to work through miracles. I believe we should turn to God first with faith and in the right circumstances faith will bring miracles.

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