

MIRACLES: MYTH OR MISNOMER.

CHAPTER 11.

The greatest miracle of all was Christ's resurrection. The greatest miracle you could reasonably expect nowadays is to recreate between humans a replica of the same relationship or indwelling that is supposed to exist between God and the soul. Indeed what better way to honour the Divine indwelling, than to enter into the creativeness of God, so as to recreate a likeness of itself? What better way of reconciliation with one's country's enemies, than imitating King Alfred's moment of sublime glory?

Such an act is "one which transcends Nature", as normally understood; and this is a better description than "miracle" for such acts. It is better, because it accommodates the scientific theory of the present day. Sixty years ago, Sir Dampier Whetham in his History of Science, said that the old idea that science dealt with inorganic matter in a materialistic way had gone: matter is not solid, it is largely space, and what there is of it is largely energy states anyway. So in pure science we are left with form, waves in the quantum theory, and curvature in relativity.

Whilst primarily science measures sense perceptions and the relationships between them, it is also concerned with persisting realities. And it is as well to remember that the Laws of Nature are mathematical expressions of the experimenter's experience. So they are interpretations of experience: and therefore describe the relationships between the concepts scientists have in their minds, rather than between the realities of Nature itself. In contrast the realities of Nature are discrete organisms: first man, then animals and plants, down to the humble amoeba. And where there is thought, as in man and animals, then of course thought influences matter; it is a characteristic of thought to do so. We all know that an act of will gets the limbs into action. We may not understand why; but it does. Moreover where there is thought, it permeates to the extremities of the creature in which it takes place. We all know a

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surgeon's skill is in his fingers, as well as in his mind. A rock-climber's skill is in the coordination of his whole body, and in his mind; only when you get hands and feet on the rock, do you know if a pitch will go. It is a characteristic of thought to influence matter. One can call this one of the Laws of the Spiritual World. Of course there are limits. Only in fairy-tales can we do whatever we like. Nevertheless science leaves the door wide open for acts of will and faith to assert themselves within the organism of which they are a part, and within the rules that creation allows.

Once this is grasped, human nature is going to probe to see what those limits are. As the New York judge, Mr. Justice Cardoso, said, "We are not so provincial as to say you are wrong, because we do not do it like that at home!" It is a very unimaginative man who considers himself bound forever by the common experience round about him. Plato, in his vivid imagery, likened him to a man imprisoned in a shadowy cave by his own inhibitions, who dared not go out into the glorious sunshine outside, simply because it was unfamiliar. Similarly, but using a different metaphor, Teilhard de Chardin wrote that the renewal of the cosmic outlook which characterises the modern mind compels all ancient religions to adjust to the immensities of space-time, or perish. I imagine that most religions are trying to adjust, at least by accepting that the Divine Creator, the Almighty, is the God of all, not simply of the favoured few. But is it possible to defy modern thought, refuse to adjust, and remain out of step with both science and conduct in the community? Yes, the fundamentalists of any religion do it; and they do it by the simple expedient of not thinking. But for those of us who are capable of thought, there is no harm in asking if acts "which transcend Nature" as normally experienced are allowed?

No physician can heal himself; so healing or Salvation must come from a spiritual intercourse between people. And what better basis for religion than to have a living

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relationship with the Divine unfathomable mystery of the Creator, complemented by a similar relationship with man; or woman?

At the same time, there is no need always to attempt the greatest miracle possible. There is good sense in seeking to accomplish smaller ones to start with; such as healing the sick, making the lame walk, and the blind see. I have no experience which allows me to comment on Harry Edwards's claim that we are just getting sufficient knowledge to appreciate that the Gospel healings should be taken literally. I can only say that in his books he says all the right things; that it is God who heals, the healer is only the channel for Divine grace; that no-one can promise to heal, healing may come or it may not; that while faith in the healing process is not necessary, obstructions can occur in the patient, which prevent healing. It is when he writes about "spirit guides" that I become uneasy. For whilst I accept that there are mediums, who display extraordinary knowledge, and possibly power, I do not want to get involved with them. Yet we are all involved with the spirit world to some extent. It is the world in which we live and move and have our being.

Let me explain. For many years I have considered that the most dry-as-dust legal argument in court is an exercise in thought transference between advocate and judge or jury: indeed rather a sophisticated one. Of course one uses reasoned argument, but the happy turn of phrase, the elegant example, are prompted by an instinct for what will appeal to one's audience. Ideally the speech is the creation of the advocate and his audience. And if you are not getting across to your audience, and you know this well enough at the time, the best thing you can do is to sit down. How does all this happen, unless there is a measure of thought transference between those involved?

I am equally convinced that thought transference can occur at a distance, as well as in Court where advocate and judge are within sight of each other; although I think this is much more rare. We all know that physical separation does not destroy family affection; it hardly

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makes any difference to it. But a harsh, cruel word injures that affection, whether the physical proximity be small or great. If something as complicated as emotion operates at a distance, may not thought transference do so as well. Goethe in one of his songs wrote,

Ich bin bei dir;	I am with thee;
Du seist auch noch so ferne,	though thou art still so far,
Du bist mir nah;	thou'rt near me;

which surely expresses the same thought or longing. Harry Edwards insisted that healing can occur at a distance. If it can take place at all, I am easily persuaded it can take place at a distance.

There have been healers in every age, and in every society. Jesus was not alone. In superstitious ages they were often condemned as witches; but even in Stuart times there was a man in Dublin, who was a respectable member of society, a doctor and a magistrate, and therefore above prosecution, who was a well known healer. Many doctors are healers in an unobtrusive way; we all instinctively prefer some doctors to others, because they give us more confidence. Sir Thomas Browne, who wrote *Religio Medici* in the 17th century, was regarded as a most sensitive physician.

Whether it is a Divine gift or a skill that can be learned is a difficult question; but not for the healer. Some healers are utterly unaware they have the gift, apparently, until suddenly circumstances reveal to them that they have it. As often as not, they seem to be appalled. To have the gift, and not use it, must seem almost like blasphemy. If with some it is a skill that can be learned, the chief difficulty, as always, must be to start. Normally, when one can do something, one forgets the process of learning. It is the same learning to ride a bicycle or conducting a prosecution. Indeed one should and must forget the learning; otherwise one never practises the skill with true confidence. It is the same with religion; the self-flagellation that takes place in the C.of E. every Sunday (if one took it seriously) would disable anyone

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from doing anything! If one wants to do anything in this world then one has to grow out of the kindergarten, and learn to live. Communion between God and man should be the most natural of relationships. Self-consciousness has no place. The great virtue of the psalms is that the psalmist had no doubt at all how to address his God, whether in praise or anguish.

Jeremiah prophesied there would be a time when God would write His laws in men's hearts. Jesus extended that vision to a time when God would live with and in men. But the response must be to live with and in Him: not by seeking a blank cheque to heaven, nor by seeking leave to do exactly as one likes; but by entering into His creative power, so far as circumstances permit. Modern science allows for this to happen!

A lesser miracle would be to fill the empty pews of the C.of E. and re-interpret Christianity so that it satisfied the souls of men. The response of the clergy to the shame of the empty pews is to say, "Get rid of the pews"; and then one no longer has to look on the shame, and perhaps can forget it. But an institution like the Army is only a shell, within which training and discipline can weld the members into a coherent fighting force. It is the men who are ultimately the Army, however necessary the shell is to give them coherence. Similarly it is the men and women in the pews who are ultimately the Church, not the shell and clerical organization which contains them. The only way to fill the pews, or the Meeting House, is to make religion satisfy the human soul; there is no other way.

In my book I created a theory of consciousness, as I had to in order to write it at all; and so created the very beginnings of a theory of thought. In doing so, I necessarily swept away many of the encrustations of traditional religion; if only because in any indwelling all beliefs are hazarded, no dogma is sacred, or the indwelling itself will be destroyed. The converse, of course, is equally true; a rigid theology if enforced, however necessary it may be to the life of an historic Church if it is to survive, effectively prevents communion between God and man, and therefore greatly inhibits communion between men as well. But with a

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theory of consciousness, the door is wide open for men to dare to create what they will. Science allows it; though the laws of Creation may limit what is possible.

Nor does it make much difference how a man spends his daily life; there are no boundaries in the spiritual world, even if there are some forbidden areas. Religion is not in a compartment of its own, separated from the professions. The preacher who has never experienced what is vulgarly called a “miracle” is like the man who has studied Demosthenes or Tom Erskine, but never opened his mouth in Court or questioned a witness. Academic learning is a noble study; it is essential to a full understanding of any subject. The man who has relied only on practical experience is likely to have developed as many bad habits, as good ones. But experience is crucial, and a more rapid teacher. The decisive question always is, “Can you do it?”