

Miracles - Their Possibility

By Rev Raymond O'Donohue, O.P.

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The question of miracles looms large in the history of religious controversy. It is an old question, but ever new. For centuries, it has divided the thinking world; it has forced Catholic and Protestant into bitter and prolonged strife, and it has ranged all the forces of unbelief in unyielding antagonism to the Christian Faith.

The lay mind may not understand why this dispute about miracles should be so bitter and protracted; yet the disputants — the attackers and the defenders of miracles — consider the question of tremendous moment, and worthy of their keenest consideration and enthusiasm.

The question of miracles is, indeed, of most vital importance. It is the aim of this treatise to stress that importance, and to outline what every intelligent Catholic should know about this fundamental problem.

WITHOUT MIRACLES NO CHRISTIANITY.

Christianity is, undeniably, a religion of miracles. To profess oneself a Christian and at the same time to deny the existence of miracles is a contradiction in terms; since fundamental dogmas of the Christian Faith, such as the Virgin Birth and Resurrection of Our Saviour, are obviously miracles. In the past those fundamental dogmas of Christianity were not frequently called in question; heretics were content to attack other Christian dogmas; but today it is precisely the foundations of the Faith that are threatened, and in its foundations the whole fabric of Christianity. Today the battle for the Faith is waged not against the heretic but against the infidel. Heretics themselves are slowly realising that, at the present day, only two armies can take the field in this momentous struggle — the Catholic and the infidel. Such is the outcome of centuries of controversy; such the logical consequences of religious events of the past four centuries (since the early 1500's).

PROTESTANTISM AND MIRACLES.

That the Protestant theory of Private Judgment led to Free-thought in matters of Faith is historically certain. Free-thought is the upshot of Protestantism. Did history leave any doubt about the matter, contemporary Protestantism, with its free-thinking bishops, deans and theologians, would dissipate it. Hence, today we find only two consistent and vital schools of religious thought, the Catholic and the Rationalist. But what now engages our attention is the narrower question of miracles; and in this question, as in every fundamental question of religion, we discover that there are only two logical attitudes, that of the Catholic and that of the Rationalist. Those who have studied the history of Christianity, especially the hostile historians Gibbon and Lecky, find in the decline of belief in the miraculous the explanation of the decline of belief in dogmatic Christianity

The first Protestants denied that miracles took place in the Catholic Church; they rejected all ecclesiastical miracles as 'Romish' lies and imposture. Naturally, the Protestant could not admit that God's miraculous approval rested on the Catholic Church which for him had ceased to be Christ's

Church; miracles, argued the Protestant, ceased in the Church when the Church fell away from Christ's teaching in the fourth or fifth century. Protestants admitted that miracles took place in the early Church, but denied that they took place in the Church when it became the 'Popish Church'. Their difficulty was to determine when and why miracles ceased in the Christian Church. Evidence in favour of miracles was as strong and unassailable in the tenth or fifteenth century as it was in the first or third century. Why then admit the earlier and deny the later miracles? Only bias could explain the Protestant attitude. Thinking Protestants soon discovered the weakness of their position and that discovery undermined the authority of the Fathers of the Church, which they had so revered. The miracles of the early Church, recorded by the Fathers, suffered the same fate at the hands of the Protestants, as did ecclesiastical miracles; both classes were relegated to the realm of myth or imposture. Protestants, as Christians, held to be authentic only one class of miracles, those worked by our Divine Saviour.

UNBELIEF CHALLENGES PROTESTANTISM.

But why draw the distinction between the miracles of Christ and those of the Christian Church? That is the question proposed by the later offspring of Protestantism, by the Freethinker and by the Liberal and Modernist Protestant. Why not reduce all miracles to the same category? If the miracles recorded by Augustine and the Bollandists are fictions or, at best, exaggerations, why should not the miracles of Christ be fictions or exaggerations? From an historical point of view, the evidence for Christ's miracles is no stronger than the evidence for patristic or ecclesiastical miracles. Why then discriminate? It is futile to appeal to infallible inspiration as a guarantee of the truth of Christ's miracles; since the theory of biblical inspiration is an exploded and obsolete superstition. That theory was based on belief in the miraculous; would you now base your belief in the miraculous on the theory of inspiration? Such is the actual challenge of unbelief to Protestantism.

MODERN UNBELIEF AND MIRACLES.

By this logical evolution of opinions, the Freethinker and the Modernist arrive at their theory of miracles in general. Miracles do not occur, nor did they ever occur. What are regarded as miracles admit of a natural explanation, or, if they cannot be explained naturally, they did not occur as they are reported to have occurred. Jesus Christ did not work miracles in the Christian sense of the word. If we accept the Gospel history in its broad outlines, we may admit that Jesus Christ did some very wonderful things, but His works were by no means miraculous. Jesus was, undoubtedly, a singular personage — a super-man if you will, — but to claim for Him divinity on the strength of His miracles is inadmissible. Miracles and dogmas alike are relics of the dark ages of superstition.

From even this brief review of the miracle controversy, it can be seen how closely interwoven with the Christian Faith is the problem of miracles. The Catholic solution of the problem is proposed in the following pages.

WHAT IS A MIRACLE?

Before we consider the various problems connected with miracles we must first determine clearly, what we mean by miracle. This absolutely essential preliminary is almost invariably overlooked by our opponents who have the vaguest possible concept of the thing they combat, and attribute to Catholics the most bizarre notions of the miraculous. Unfortunately, there are also Christians who attempt to defend miracles against the attacks of unbelief, without having first stated clearly, what they mean by miracle.

The English word "miracle" is derived from the Latin "miraculum" which meant originally a wonder or an extraordinary happening. We still use the word miracle in this loose sense when we call Michaelangelo's Moses a "miracle" of art, or when we say that a person escaped death in an accident by a "miracle." In Christian Theology, however, the word "miracle" has assumed a very definite and technical meaning; it signifies an extraordinary occurrence attributable only to God. We shall now explain this traditional concept of miracle, taking as our guide the official theologian of the Church, the great Saint Thomas Aquinas.

Saint Thomas defines a miracle as an effect beyond the power of nature produced by God in an unusual way. This definition calls for explanation, if we are to have an accurate idea of what is meant by a miracle.

FIRST MARK OF A MIRACLE.

First, a miracle is beyond the power of any creature to produce; it exceeds not merely the power of a particular created agent, but the combined power of all creatures, of creation as a whole. No created force, no combination of created forces, can produce a miracle. There are phenomena, such as telepathy, levitation and suggestion-cure, which certainly exceed the physical powers of nature, but can be explained as the effects of a mysterious psychic force within man. Such phenomena, however strange and unfathomed, are not miracles, because they do not demand the intervention of God for their production. A miracle, then, is an effect which God alone can produce.

GOD'S INSTRUMENTS IN WORKING MIRACLES.

If God alone can work miracles, why do Catholics, say that their saints worked miracles, that diseases have been miraculously cured by saints' relics and by the waters at Lourdes? In making such statements, no Catholic implies that the saints or their relics work miracles of themselves, or by virtue of any inherent power within them, but solely by virtue of a supernatural power communicated to them by God. Surely, God can use a creature as the instrument of His Omnipotence to produce an effect which the creature of itself could not produce. An artist paints a Masterpiece by means of his brushes and colours, but of themselves, those instruments of his art could not produce a single line. In a similar, though utterly transcendent way, God uses the Sacraments and His ministers to produce grace in men's souls. Likewise He can use instruments, human and inanimate, to produce a miraculous effect, which is something infinitely inferior to grace. But God, and only He, is the principal author of grace and miracles.

SECOND ESSENTIAL MARK OF A MIRACLE.

To have God for its author is not the characteristic mark of a miracle. If it were, we should have to class as miracles all supernatural effects as well as those works in nature which belong exclusively to God. Only God can create a human soul, and give to that soul the supernatural life of grace; only He can sustain the frail existence of created things, and set in motion the creatures He has made. Yet, none of these works of God are miracles because they lack the essential trait of a miracle, which is to be "extraordinary." A miracle is extraordinary in this sense, that it is a work outside God's ordinary providence. God in His ordinary Providence produces effects according to definite fixed laws; a miracle transcends those laws, and in that sense is extraordinary or unusual. Let us illustrate our meaning by examining various classes of miracles.

VARIOUS KINDS OF MIRACLES.

God in His ordinary Providence produces effects by means of created causes to which He gives the power to act. Thus, a wound is healed by the vital processes of a living organism, and the cure is governed by the fixed law of physiology. In a miraculous cure, God dispenses with the natural process, and produces, instantaneously, an effect which nature could bring about only by slow and patient labour. Ordinarily, God allows nature to take its course, but for his own good reasons He sometimes intervenes, and effects a cure in a way beyond the powers of nature. Such miraculous works, which transcend the powers of nature only in the way they are performed and not in themselves, are regarded as the lowest class of miracles. The instantaneous cure of tedious, though curable, maladies, the instantaneous multiplication of substances, the instantaneous change of one substance into another are miracles of this order.

A higher class of miracle is the supernatural cure of an incurable disease or the raising of the dead to life. Usually God allows the laws of disease and death to run their course, but at times, His omnipotence intervenes, and restores to health men stricken with an incurable disease, and gives back the dead to life. Miracles of this class exceed the powers of nature not merely in the way they are accomplished but in themselves; for nature cannot cure an incurable disease, or restore the dead.

Besides the positive miracles just enumerated there are others which are negative. These consist in the divine prevention of an effect which in normal circumstances would necessarily follow. Fire, for instance, by the laws of nature, consumes a combustible body within its reach; but fire, like every created agent, depends for its activity on God's impelling force; fire could not burn unless God enabled it to do so. Ordinarily, God gives to creatures the power by which they act, but He does so without obligation or compulsion; He can, if He so pleases, withhold that power from His creatures, as He did when the fire did not consume the Hebrew youths who were cast into a furnace by the Chaldeans (Daniel, chapter 3). That was a negative miracle; and there are many other miracles related in Holy Scripture and history which may likewise be explained as divine preventions, due to the withdrawal of that power which God normally communicates to creatures to enable them to act.

We see, then, from the examination of various classes of miracles, the meaning and justification of Saint Thomas' definitions: A miracle is an effect which only God can produce; and its essential mark is, that it is produced by Him, not according to the ordinary laws of His Providence, which we usually call the laws of nature, but according to a higher law — the Supreme Law of His Wisdom and Omnipotence.

MIRACLES OF FAITH.

An enumeration of the various classes of miracles would be incomplete without mention of some other divisions of miracles besides the general divisions we have just considered. There are miracles of Faith which we believe but cannot see or understand. The Holy Eucharist is a perpetual miracle; for, in that Sacrament the accidents of bread are sustained in a miraculous way by the omnipotence of God. Colour, taste and shape, which are accidents of bread, normally require the substance of bread to support them, but in the Eucharist, the substance of bread has been changed into Jesus Christ, and those accidents, not having their natural substance to support them, require to be supported by God's Omnipotence. Like-wise, the Sacred Humanity of Christ is maintained miraculously without the aid of human personality by the substitution of a Divine Person for the human. Those miracles, which are also mysteries of Faith, are beyond the range of our experience and vision: we believe them; we do not see them; they do not prove the reasonableness of our Faith, but demand other miracles to prove their reasonableness. Those miracles of Faith are not the subject

of our present study; they belong not to the defence of Faith but to Faith itself; they are theological mysteries not apologetic miracles.

APOLOGETIC MIRACLES.

It is with apologetic miracles we are concerned, with those miracles which fall 'within the range of human-experience, whose existence can be established by rational enquiry, and whose purpose is to prove the reasonableness of our Faith'. It is from their purpose that those miracles derive their name "apologetic," which means defensive. Those miracles constitute a rational defence of our Faith.

Apologetic miracles are of three kinds: intellectual, moral and physical.

Prophecy and infused knowledge are intellectual miracles; both are beyond the powers and laws of created intellect. Prophecy is the foretelling of future events which depend on divine or human liberty. Only God can with certainty foresee such events, and, consequently, He alone can impart a knowledge of them. Likewise, only God can in an instant endow the human mind with a knowledge of any art or science. God has at times bestowed this infused knowledge on His saints to enable them to speak languages they had never learned, or to discourse profoundly on theology which they had never studied.

Moral miracles are effects which transcend the ordinary laws that govern human life and human activity. The supernatural propagation of Christianity and the marks or notes of the Catholic Church are miracles of this order.

There remain physical miracles to which the name "miracle" is principally, and sometimes exclusively, applied. Those Miracles are physical effects, which surpass the powers and laws of nature, produced by God for a special purpose. Most miracles we read of in the Gospels are of this kind: the raising of the dead, extraordinary cures, multiplication of substance, et cetera.

Physical miracles occupy most of our attention in the following pages; nevertheless, the principles laid down and the conclusions established can be applied with equal success to all classes of miracles, physical, intellectual and moral.

ARE MIRACLES POSSIBLE?

To the Catholic that question must seem little short of blasphemy. To deny the possibility of miracles outright is sheer blasphemy — however unintentional the blasphemy may be — for to do so involves the denial of God's existence, or the denial of one of those essential attributes by virtue of which God is God. How comes it, then, that the denial of this possibility of miracles, either expressed or implied, is so frequent outside the Catholic Church? 'The reason is that outside the Church the most erroneous notions prevail about God and His divine nature and this is due to the fact that outside the Church the sound philosophy of common sense has little vogue.

(Footnote: By "Common Sense", we mean the native, instinctive power of the human mind to reach true conclusions from first, self-evident principles. The conclusions thus reached by the spontaneous action of the mind are also called "Common Sense.")

Since her foundation, the Church has had to safeguard and defend not only the supernatural truth committed to her care but also the natural truths of human reason; and probably never before in her long history has the Church's defence of natural truth been so necessary as it is today. That miracles are possible is not merely a truth of the Catholic and Christian Faith but of natural reason as well. To admit that truth one need not be a Catholic or even a Christian; he need only be a man, a creature

of reason and common sense. It is surprising, then, that antagonism to miracles should be so prevalent in the world today, and more surprising still that Christian theologians should be so diffident in face of the prevailing prejudice. The miracle question is the bug-bear of the non-Catholic theologian; he may not deny that miracles are possible, but he is persuaded that miracles are no longer the bulwark of Christianity but an obstacle to its success.

MODERN PREJUDICE AGAINST MIRACLES.

That not all those who reject miracles expressly deny their possibility must not blind us to the fact that the modern prejudice against miracles — a prejudice that defines a miracle as that which does not happen — is rooted in the persuasion that miracles cannot happen. The possibility of miracles is not discussed today as it was a life-time ago, but this does not indicate that the moderns take the possibility for granted — rather the contrary. Besides, not many today so get to the bottom of things as to discuss their possibility or impossibility.

‘Higher Criticism’ bears ample testimony that the modern prejudice against miracles is really based on the denial of their possibility. If a document contains miracle narrative it is without more ado classed as legend, and its author, whatever be his credentials, is ruled out of court as an unreliable witness to the truth. Our higher critics re-echo Renan's words in his infamous *Life of Jesus*, "I do not reject the gospel miracles because it has been shown that the evangelists are unworthy witnesses; but on the contrary I say the gospels are legends because they record miracles... It is a principle of criticism that a miracle can have no place in the scheme of human affairs."

To discover the cause of the widespread antagonism to miracles we should distinguish between the unreasoning denial of miracles and the reasoned denial of a false philosophy. Many deny miracles because they do not think, others because their thought is warped by bad philosophy.

"MODERN MIND" AND MIRACLES.

Formerly (and formally) it was the philosopher's privilege to deny miracles, but the philosopher considered himself obliged to give reasons for his denial; today there are many persons who claim the philosopher's privilege without fulfilling the philosopher's obligations. This growing class of "enlightened" laymen rejects miracles without giving us the reason why. Of course, they tell us that miracles are 'discredited by science', that miracles are opposed to science, that no educated man today admits miracles and so on, but these assertions are not reasons, they are tags culled from the "stunt" articles of some enterprising newspaper or from the pages of a pseudo-scientific novelist.

Here we have the tragedy of "Modern Thought": its victims will not think for themselves, indeed, they seem incapable of doing so; and lacking ideas of their own they borrow from the shallow sources in which the modern world abounds. The "intellectual" novelist with his smattering of a few contradictory philosophies will supply the latest philosophy of life; the pseudo scientist will explain the origin of all things, including himself, in a few pages of unproved, unprovable, and often disproved theories; and some encyclopaedic journalist will solve the problems that have puzzled the greatest minds of our race in a smart "Outline of History," against whom there is no appeal, and who are believed by their victims with a simplicity that would be amusing were it not tragic. Little wonder, then, that minds so tutored and enlightened should be convinced that no educated person can believe in miracles, that science is opposed to miracles and has explained them away. Those and similar tags form the convictions of shallow minds that are profoundly ignorant of what is education, of what is science and, above all, what is a miracle.

The genuine scientist will dissociate himself from the class of persons just described. He may not be a believer; he may not even have a definite philosophy, but he knows that as a scientist he may not ventilate his views on the possibility or impossibility of miracles. Accustomed as he is to the regularity of nature and to a mathematical outlook he may be naturally prejudiced against miracles, his mind, like Darwin's, may be incapable of seeing beyond visible cause and effect; he ceases to speak as a scientist and assumes the role of philosopher. Philosophy can then meet him on its own ground and prove to him that physical nature with its laws and measurements is not the sum total of reality, that there is a Reality which the microscope cannot reveal or the test-tube confine, a Reality beyond physical cause and effect which we name God.

THE FALSE PHILOSOPHIES AND MIRACLES.

From the very definition of miracle, it is obvious that a philosophy which denies the existence of God cannot admit the possibility of miracles; since a miracle is the direct work of God. Hence, all the atheistic and materialistic philosophies necessarily deny the possibility of miracles. Moreover, a miracle demands not only a God, but a God that is free to intervene in His creation and produce an effect in an extraordinary way. It follows that those systems of philosophy that deny God's liberty also deny that miracles are possible. Thus, Pantheism must deny miracles, since it identifies God and the world, and teaches that the universe is merely the necessary evolution of the Deity. Lastly, in order to work a miracle God's providence and power must reach to the miraculous effect He produces. Deism, which had much vogue in the eighteenth century, denied that divine providence extends to particular effects. Miracles can have no place in such a system.

As philosophies, those systems are dead or dying, but their dregs are being served to uncritical palates in the modern "intellectual" novel and in the popular travesties of science!

Common sense, not to speak of rational philosophy, will not brook the denial of a First Cause, whose existence is proclaimed by the world outside, and the conscience within man. Common sense knows instinctively that to be God, the First Cause must be distinct from the universe about us, utterly transcendent and at the same time ever present in His creation, knowing all things and causing all things. Only a philosophy perverted in its principles and bewildered by its speculations could deny those essential truths about God and His divine Nature.

THE THEORY OF DETERMINISM.

The false philosophies we have named introduced a theory of nature called Determinism, which until the dawn of this (20th) century was widely popular, and which still influences minds that cling to outworn theories. Determinism regarded nature as a great machine working out results with mathematical necessity, according to inflexible laws. This theory leaves no place for miracles, since every effect is due to natural forces governed by unalterable law. Inexorable law governs all the activities of nature: fire must burn, for it is a law of nature; the dead cannot return to life for that too, is a law of nature. The sacred inviolableness of nature's laws was the great fetish of the past (19th) century.

Determinism, like many another false theory, is the exaggeration of a truth. There is determinism in nature — a fact too obvious to deny — but not an absolute determinism, a physical, not a metaphysical or mathematical, determinism. The laws of nature produce their effects of necessity but not of absolute necessity. The laws of nature are physical laws and quite different from mathematical or metaphysical laws; the latter are of absolute necessity, the former of conditional necessity. The law that 2 plus 2 equal 4, or the law that the whole is greater than the part, is of

absolute necessity; such laws require no condition for their validity, and admit of no exception. But the law that fire burns, or that a solid body falls, is not absolutely necessary, because the conditions necessary for either effect may be absent. Fire will not burn an incombustible material, asbestos, for example, and the law of gravity may be counteracted by a superior law, as when a stone is thrown into the air or when water will not fall from an inverted vessel which has been covered with a sheet of paper. The laws of nature, therefore, do not produce their effects with absolute necessity but depend upon certain conditions for their activity.

MIRACLES AND THE LAWS OF NATURE.

In the case of a miracle, the conditions required for the normal action of nature's law are not fulfilled owing to the intervention of the supreme law of nature, the power of the Creator over His creation. Just as the superior law of atmospheric pressure counteracts the effects of the less powerful law of gravity when water does not fall from an inverted glass which has been covered with a sheet of paper, so the supreme law of the Creator's control of nature counteracts or modifies the effects of natural law when God performs a miracle. It is, indeed, a law of nature that fire burns, but the fire's activity is conditioned, above all else, by the will of the Creator freely bestowing on it the force by which it burns. In a miracle, like that related in the Book of Daniel, the law that fire burns combustible bodies did not operate, because God, in that particular instance, withheld the power by which fire normally burns. It is the law of nature that the dead do not return to life, but the Lord of Life and Death may intervene and so alter the natural circumstances that in a particular instance nature's law of death no longer dominates.

It is incorrect to say that miracles violate the laws of nature. No law states, absolutely, that a cause necessarily produces an effect, but that a particular cause under certain definite conditions produces a particular effect. When a miracle is performed, the conditions required for the normal effect are so modified by divine intervention that the normal effect does not follow. The law is not violated, for the conditions under which it stated that the effect would follow are not verified. When a boy counteracts the law of gravity by throwing a stone he does not violate the law of gravity; and why should God violate that law when, by His power He enables a saint to walk upon the sea?

LAWS OF CONSERVATION AND MIRACLES.

In their attacks on miracles, amateur scientists frequently assert that miracles contradict the law of the Conservation of Energy and are, therefore impossible. Let us examine their objection. They say that it is a law of nature that the total sum of energy in the universe remains constant, neither increasing or decreasing. Thus stated their law of Conservation is not a law, still less is it an axiom, as some of those scientists seem to take it for granted. It is not an axiom, for the statement is not self-evident; nor is it a law, for it has not been established inductively, and obviously can never be verified. How could it be possible to determine the amount of energy in the universe at a given moment and then again at another given moment, to prove that the sum total of energy has neither increased nor decreased? Formulated in such sweeping fashion the so-called law of conservation is not a law but an approved and unprovable theory, which many great scientists regard as inapplicable to vital energy in the universe.

The true law of the Conservation of Energy is formulated thus: in a closed system, energy is neither lost nor gained. That is a law proved by innumerable experiments, and equivalently stated very many centuries ago by philosophers on purely metaphysical grounds. The law merely states that the total amount of energy in a material system cannot vary, provided the system neither parts with

energy to other bodies nor receives energy from them. Needless to say the energy of which physical science speaks is material energy; it is outside the province of physical science to discuss the spiritual energy of man's intellect and will or the transcendent energy of God; such "energy" lies beyond measurements and calculation.

Our teaching on miracles is in no way opposed to the law of Conservation properly formulated; nor does it necessitate the rejection of the theory that the amount of energy in the universe is constant, but it does oppose the application of that theory to the universe as a closed system. The universe is not a closed system, self-sustained and uninfluenced by any outside agent. Philosophy proves that outside our universe there is a Power that brought the universe into being, that sustains and actuates it. That power, which is God, has produced all things with their energies from nothing; and God can, if He so wills, create a new energy or so modify energy as to produce an effect beyond the power of natural forces.

It does not seem necessary to the working of a miracle that God should create new energy in the world; He can produce a miraculous effect by exploiting existing energy in a way beyond the powers of nature: The same principle may be applied to the theory of the Conservation of Matter in the universe. A miracle does not demand the creation of new matter; existing energy and matter may be utilised. This we affirm not because God cannot create matter or energy, if He so pleases, but because it seems unnecessary to postulate creation in the working of miracles.

The denial of the possibility of miracles on the score that they are opposed to the laws of Conservation is meaningless unless God's existence be also denied; and the scientist who denies God's existence does violence to common sense and abandons science for false philosophy.

MIRACLES NO DANGER TO SCIENCE.

Science, therefore, has nothing to fear from miracles, for they in no way effect the established laws of science. In his investigations, the scientist takes no account of miracles. It is puerile to declare, as Huxley did, that the possibility of miracles would render scientific experiment useless, since a miracle might happen at any moment and upset all our calculations. This is to misunderstand completely the nature of a miracle. A miracle is the work of an all-wise and provident God, and shall we imagine that such a God will capriciously frustrate scientific investigation! Such a concept of God is surely absurd. God works miracles but seldom and for the weightiest motives; and when He deigns to do so His wonderful handiwork will be sufficiently obvious, as we shall prove later on.

Scientists of the old materialist school, who regarded theology as the great enemy of science, would be very surprised indeed to find in the defenders of miracles champions of the fundamental principles of physical science. Yet, that is what is actually happening today. The latest attack on miracles is not against miracles alone but against the very foundations of physical science; and in defending miracles the theologian and Christian philosopher find it necessary to insist on the basic truth of science, if they are to safeguard Christian miracles. The old attack on miracles was made in the honoured name of Science: the new attack strikes at miracles by undermining the foundations of science. Here we have an illustration of the principle that truth is one and unchangeable, error manifold and contradictory.

CONTINGENTISM AND MIRACLES.

The modern attack on miracles is found in the theory of contingency or Contingentism. Contingentism is the very antithesis of the dogmatic Determinism we have just examined, and finds

much favour with the modern philosophers. The determinists held that nature and its laws produce effects with such absolute necessity that even God, if there be a God, cannot intervene to work a miracle. The contingentists, on the contrary, say that there is no such thing as law in nature, or even if there be law, we cannot know that there is; nature is a chaos of exceptions and haphazard events, and the laws that seem to rule the universe are in reality the product of our own minds or imaginations.

The ancestry of this theory is not difficult to trace; it dates back to the old sceptic philosophies, but in Agnosticism, particularly in the Kantian system, we discover its true parents. Bergsonian philosophy, which has a vogue in some countries today, professes Contingentism, and many (not all) current theories of Relativity are based on it.

It is clear that there can be no place for miracles in the theory of contingency, since miracles presuppose stability, and uniformity in nature. A miracle is an effect produced by God beyond the laws of nature; if there are no laws in nature, a miracle is inconceivable; and if all nature is a chaos of exceptions, how shall we discover that peculiar exception called a miracle? Contingentism is as fatal to miracles as is Determinism.

IS THE THEORY OF CONTINGENCE TRUE?

Common sense and sane philosophy reject the agnostic principles, on which Contingentism is based, as radically false and destructive of thought; common experience stoutly proclaims that there is law and uniformity in nature; all the physical sciences bear witness to the reign of law throughout the universe. When Contingentism, or its parent philosophy, proves that our faculties are untrustworthy and the facts of experience a magnificent illusion we shall agree that there are no laws in nature. But that proof is not forthcoming; nor can we see of what value such proof could be if our minds and all our faculties are essentially deceptive. Pending the arrival of a proof which, from the nature of the case, cannot be produced, we hold with common sense that there are laws in nature, because things act in a regular and uniform way: because under given conditions fire will always burn and solid bodies will always fall. If this be illusion, then everything is illusion, and we had better follow the advice of the old sceptic, Pyrrho, and give up thinking altogether.

Though we maintain that there is a universal reign of law in nature, we do not claim to know all the laws of nature nor do we claim that our statement of those laws is perfect. Contingentism finds no support in the fact that from time to time the formulation of a law calls for adjustment, owing to further scientific discovery. That fact does not prove that there is contingency in nature, but proves our imperfect knowledge of nature's determinism. As science progresses it reveals with ever increasing clearness the universal reign of law throughout creation.

A SUMMING-UP.

To sum up the discussion on the possibility of miracles: There can be only two reasons why miracles should be impossible, either because there is no fixed course in nature outside of which an extraordinary effect can be produced, or because there is no God capable of producing that effect. Neither reason survives scrutiny by ordinary common sense, still less the criticism of that systematised common sense which is the traditional Catholic philosophy. Nature runs its fixed course ruled by definite laws; and, beyond nature, there is God, the first Cause of all things, infinitely transcending nature yet sustaining, moving, guiding nature in all her activities. God has not exhausted His Omnipotence in creating our universe; His power is not restricted to what His creation can accomplish. He can produce effects which baffle nature: raise the dead to life or cure a

fatal disease; and He can perform, without the help of nature, a work which nature could perform in a less striking way: He can cure a grievous malady in an instant, or change water into wine. To contend that God can do no more than nature, is to deny His existence. Man, himself, by the use of his intelligence can accomplish works that surpass the unaided powers of nature and fill us with admiration: he can harness nature's forces and make them subservient to his will; man's victory over nature is writ large across the length and breadth of modern civilisation. If man, then, is able to modify nature and obtain the victory over nature by directing natural forces to his own ends; if by exploiting the forces of nature he can obtain results which nature, without the help of man's inventive mind and dominant will, could never achieve, shall not God, this all-wise and all-powerful Author of creation, be capable of modifying the course of nature and of producing effects beyond the power of any of His creatures?

Our contention seems only too obvious to the Catholic Mind, but it must be insisted on and explained because, as has been said, prejudice against miracles has its root in the irrational denial of their possibility. In determining, therefore, whether a miracle really occurred there can be no appeal to antecedent impossibility; it is all a question of evidence. The evidence in favour of miracles should be weighed critically and dispassionately, and not according to irrational prejudice.

(Footnote: The nature and strength of the evidence in favour of miracles is examined as another booklet: "Do Miracles Happen". Miracles are provable!)

ARE MIRACLES PROBABLE?

We take it as proved, then, that miracles are possible. Are they also antecedently probable? In other words, is it not only possible that God can intervene in the ordinary scheme of things but is it to be expected that He will do so? The likelihood of God's miraculous intervention will depend on how far miracles are in keeping with His divine attributes; on how far miracles demand a place in the scheme of divine Providence. If we found it difficult to reconcile the working of miracles with any of God's divine attributes, with His Wisdom or Goodness for instance, we could not say that miracles were provable, though we have proved that from the point of view of God's Omnipotence, they are possible. If miracles were merely a 'wanton display of divine Power' without meaning or purpose, and did not fill a very proper, and almost necessary, place in God's wise and beneficent Providence, we should not regard miracles as likely, however clearly their possibility has been demonstrated. The whole problem of the antecedent probability of miracles is reduced to this: can we show that God has a sufficient reason for working miracles? The stronger the reason for miracles the likelier will miracles become; if we can discover an urgent reason why miracles should happen, it is very probable that they have happened. An urgent need for miracles would not only justify God's miraculous intervention in the world but would, as it were, provoke God's goodness to meet that need and work miracles. In examining miracles, Catholic Theology discovers that they not only fulfil a divine purpose which justifies their existence, but fulfil a purpose so effectively as to be almost indispensable.

THIS ANTAGONISM TO MIRACLES.

The unyielding antagonism of our opponents to Christian and Catholic miracles has already been emphasised: If the miracle controversy were a purely speculative one, that antagonism would be difficult to understand, for men do not commonly show great resentment and bitterness in discussing purely theoretical questions. No, it is the practical consequence of miracles that stirs our

opponents to enmity and strife; for the practical consequence of miracles is tremendous, indeed overwhelming.

Once prove that Christ really worked a miracle or that a miracle was performed within the Catholic Church in confirmation of Catholic doctrine, and a thousand philosophies and creeds crumble in ruins. It would follow, first of all, that all the naturalistic philosophies are false, because a miracle proves that there is a personal, supernatural God to whom all things are subject, Who exercises a supreme and, independent providence over the world. It would follow that Jesus Christ was all He claimed to be, because his words bear the seal of the all-truthful God; that Christ's commands and moral precepts must be obeyed, because they are God's precepts and commands. How many infidelities, how many easy philosophies of life and conduct, receive their death-blow from the simple truth that Jesus Christ worked miracles; how irksome in its consequences is that truth to the majority of men. Lastly, it would follow from the truth of Catholic miracles that the Catholic Church is all she claims to be: God's divine mouthpiece, the infallible interpreter of Christ's message to men, the supreme arbiter upon earth of Christian faith and Christian morals. Then might seven hundred jarring sects cease their wrangling, and pride themselves no more on their sole common cause of undying antagonism to Rome — for she is the haven of Salvation and their Mother

Little wonder, then, that the miracle controversy raises such a storm of protest and indignation. Men do not placidly forego their cherished prejudices or renounce lightly their life-long persuasions. Yet, it is one of the purposes of miracles to rid us of our false prejudices and to dissipate those errors regarding God and the world to which the human mind is so prone.
