

# AREOPAGUS JOURNAL

THE JOURNAL OF THE APOLOGETICS RESOURCE CENTER

MARCH | APRIL 2008

Miracles



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# VERITAS: Miracles



{ BY CRAIG BRANCH }

*Craig Branch is the director of the Apologetics Resource Center, Birmingham, Alabama.*

When most people consider the discipline of apologetics, responding to the objections of non-Christians comes to mind. And indeed that is an important application, but apologetics is for the believer as well, on several levels. Apologetics is for believers who may have doubts or questions, helping them find the answers they seek and learning to understand not only what we believe but why we believe it. Additionally, it also helps provide discernment in the face of heretical doctrine.

The theme of this *Areopagus Journal* is miracles. The objective is to explain the apologetic significance of miracles as it applies to both non-believers and believers, as well as respond to objections that skeptics have raised to miracle-claims.

## DEFINING MIRACLES

It is important that we start with a clear definition of a miracle. There are several ways in which they have been defined. One might characterize a miracle as some event or manifestation that creates a deep sense of aesthetic awe, wonder, or reverence. It doesn't have to be outside of "science." It could be something as common as the birth of a baby, for example. This is usually not what apologists and skeptics of miracles mean by "miracle," though.

The more common definition is a supernatural event or "a special act of God that interrupts the natural course of events."<sup>1</sup> So understood, in miraculous events the laws of nature are suspended by the intentional action of God. This is a useful definition of miracles and it will play a significant role in the articles throughout this journal. ►

Alternatively, an event need not run counter to the laws of nature in order to count as miraculous. It might be seen as a special act of God because of its context.

Examples would be the sudden remission of cancer, with or without therapy or treatment, after a Christian or group prays for a healing. Natural processes may have been involved but the context and timing of the person's recovery signals God's intervention. I had such an experience with my mother who was diagnosed with bone cancer in her back and the Lord led me to pray and fast for her for three days. When the surgeons opened her up, the cancer was gone but scar tissue was on the bones. They were predictably shocked. One doctor said that there was a remotely possible natural explanation, but a better one was that it was a "miracle."

Miracles defined in these latter two ways are our concern in this issue of *Areopagus Journal*.

### MIRACLES AND APOLOGETICS

Miracles have traditionally been utilized in Christian apologetics to provide evidences and affirmation for the existence of an all-knowing, all powerful God and the authenticity of His revelation in Christ and the Bible. For example, when one considers the centerpiece of Christianity, the bodily resurrection of Christ (1 Cor.15:3-19), the importance of miracles as proof and vindication of Christianity should be obvious. Peter used the message and fact of the miraculous, including the resurrection, to open the eyes and convict the hearts of the Jews (Acts 2:22-37). He also shared the event of the resurrection to the Gentile Cornelius (Acts 10:34-45). And later Paul used the factual proof of the resurrection in his apologetic to the Greek philosophers at Areopagus (Acts 17:30-34).

The many miracles of Jesus (e.g., raising Lazarus and others from the dead, healing

many diseases, walking on water, calming the storm, supernatural knowledge, feeding the multitudes, future predictions) all give significant attestation of the purposeful intervention of God in His creative order.

In addition, we have Christ's disciples and apostles performing miracles, attesting to the validity of the Christian message. We read of numerous claims of healing and raising the dead.


Of course skeptics naturally question the validity of those miracles, viewing them as either superstitious nonsense, manipulations of nature,

concoctions of con-artists, or as otherwise having natural explanations. Skeptics also argue that we simply could not have enough evidence for a miracle to override our confidence in the regularity and orderliness of nature. Some point out that other religions also claim miraculous attestation, yet Christians claim that those religions are false. Thus, noted atheist David Hume argued that "miracles" in conflicting religions are self-canceling.

We intend to respond to these kinds of objections to miracles in this issue of *Areopagus Journal*. In our first article, ARC's Steve Cowan contributes, "Discerning the Voice of God," in which he explains in more detail the role of miracles in apologetics and responds to Hume's charge that miracle-claims from competing religions cancel each other out.

Christian philosopher and apologist Dr. Winfried Corduan responds to other skeptical objections, including those of David Hume and Antony Flew, in "Miracles and Their Omniscient Critics." As you will see, most arguments against miracles claim that we could not have enough evidence for them to override our confidence in the laws of nature, or that science somehow makes miracles unlikely or belief in them irrational. Corduan aptly shows that all such arguments require that the skeptic be omniscient—which, of course, is impossible.

We must also point out that the inconsistency ►



“BOTH GROUPS OF  
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between miracles and nature only applies to one specific “scientific” worldview, a mechanistic view that claims everything that occurs happens only according to rigid scientific laws which totally control everything. Perhaps we should, with tongue in cheek, reply that it is the scientific naturalists who demonstrate the most “faith” in order to believe the plausibility of macro-evolution.

### DO MIRACLES STILL HAPPEN?

When it comes to apologetics, the primary concern regarding miracles are ones that occurred in the past. Given that God gave the prophets and apostles miraculous attestation for their revelations, the apologist seeks to confirm that the miracles connected with that revelation actually occurred. Nevertheless, there is a secondary issue of great importance to the Christian community.

Some Christians believe that the miraculous sign gifts described in Ephesians 4:11 and 1 Corinthians 12-14 continue in the church today and will continue until Christ comes again. These Christians are called continuationists. Other Christians believe that those miraculous gifts were designed to function only during the foundational period of the Church (cf. Eph. 2:20) and ceased with the death of the apostles. These Christians are called cessationists. Both groups of Christians agree that God can and does manifest miracles today, but they disagree on whether God endows contemporary Christians with miraculous gifts as he did the biblical prophets and apostles. Closely related to this question is whether or not prophets and/or apostles exist today as well.

Given the significance of this debate in the church today, we have decided to include

a point/counterpoint exchange between two theologians on the question of the continuation of miracles. Dr. Sam Storms represents the continuationist position, arguing that God does still bestow miraculous gifts on his people today. Dr. Sam Waldron represents the cessationist position, arguing that the miraculous gifts are no longer given. Each presenter also provides a response to the other’s article.

The main concern of the cessationist is that continuationism undermines the sufficiency of Scripture and opens the door for people to be deceived and misled in life decisions. Continuationists, on the other hand, assert that to not seek after and exercise the miraculous gifts quenches the Spirit and hinders the advance of the Kingdom.

Regardless of one’s stance on the continuationism/cessationism debate, we can all agree that the greatest miracle of all is that God had mercy on you and me, overruled our rebellion towards Him, suffered an awful death on the cross, and was miraculously raised for our salvation. Amazing grace, how sweet the sound that saved a wretch like me! Amazing love, how can it be, that Thou my God would die for me!

### NOTES

<sup>1</sup>Norman Geisler, *Baker Encyclopedia of Christian Apologetics* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books: 1999), 450.

“THE MANY MIRACLES OF JESUS GIVE  
SIGNIFICANT ATTESTATION OF THE  
PURPOSEFUL INTERVENTION OF GOD IN  
HIS CREATIVE ORDER.”



# AGAINST HERESIES

{ BY CLETTE HUX }

With the presidential candidacy of Barack Obama, Liberation Theology has come to the forefront of public attention. This attention is mainly due to Obama's outspoken pastor, Jeremiah Wright, of the Trinity United Church of Christ (UCOC) in Chicago, Illinois. The controversy caused by Wright raises questions that many people would like answered such as: (1) What is Liberation Theology? (2) What do Reverend Wright and the UCOC teach in regard to this? (3) Does Barack Obama hold to Liberation Theology? (4) Is Liberation Theology biblical? And (5) What should be our Christian response? I will seek to briefly answer these questions in this column.

“LIBERATION THEOLOGY IS  
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## WHAT IS LIBERATION THEOLOGY?

Basically, Liberation Theology (LT) is a theological perspective that interprets the Christian message as being mostly about the social, political, and economic deliverance of the poor and oppressed. It has its roots in South America from over a half-century ago when Marxism began making great strides with the poor because of its emphasis on the redistribution of wealth, allowing poor peasants to improve their economic status. The LT movement teaches that God is the

liberator of those oppressed by the ruling classes. In South America during the turbulent 1950s, this theology became the basis for a revolutionary agenda. The emphasis in LT is not on an individual's salvation from sin, but the salvation of a community by overcoming oppression.

More recently, the influence of LT has moved from South America to the poor African-American community in North America where it has come to be called Black Liberation Theology (BLT). Many scholars point to James Cone, professor of theology at Union Theological Seminary in Manhattan, as having imported LT to the United States.<sup>1</sup> Cone himself credits the movement's roots to the 1960s' civil rights activism and draws inspiration from both Martin Luther King, Jr. and Malcolm X, calling LT "mainly a theology that sees God as concerned with the poor and the weak."<sup>2</sup> He explains that at the core of BLT is an effort to make the gospel relevant to the plight of American blacks in a white-dominated society where black has been defined as evil. It also seeks to help black people learn to love themselves. He says it is an attempt to teach people how to be both unapologetically black and Christian at the same time.<sup>3</sup>

### WRIGHT AND OBAMA

There is no voice in America today trumpeting the BLT message louder than Jeremiah Wright, Barack Obama's pastor, who recently stepped down from his pulpit at Chicago's Trinity United Church of Christ. Some have seen his pastoral resignation as an indication that Wright intends to address a much larger audience with his message.

According to Trinity's website, Rev. Wright has four earned degrees and eight honorary doctorates. He became the pastor of Trinity in 1972 and was committed to the church's motto: "Unashamedly black and unapologetically Christian." A quick review of Trinity's statements of faith and mission, including Rev. Wright's talking points, shows an explicit commitment to BLT. The church's promotion of its 12-point "Black Value System" asks members to measure the worth of all activity in terms of "positive contributions to the general welfare of the black community and the advancement of all black leadership who espouse and embrace the Black Value System."<sup>4</sup>

Such emphasis on the "black" condition certainly is consistent with BLT, for it interprets all life issues through ethnocentric lenses, focused upon the black race in America and their liberation from the oppressive white culture. The focus is to affirm black humanity while at the same time emancipating black people from white racism.


BLT is no friend to American patriotism. It is essentially a revolutionary ideology that is African-centered and in opposition to American culture. BLT theologians have demonstrated this through their writings and public addresses. Rev. Wright is no exception. When he stepped down as Trinity's pastor he began devoting himself full time to promoting his message through his publication, *Trumpet News Magazine*. A recent news article tells how Wright is using his *Trumpet* to advance criticism of the United States among African Americans, who are more often referred to by Wright as "Africans living in the Western Diaspora."<sup>5</sup> It seems that he thinks of blacks as in, but not of, America. In the same article, Wright makes a case for viewing the United States as a criminal nation, speaking of blacks as "songbirds" locked in "this cage called America."<sup>6</sup>

Wright's most vocal attack on America came from one of his 2003 sermons in which he pinned black people's troubles on the racism that still exists in the U.S., crying out, "No, no, no, not God bless America! God damn America—that's in the Bible—for killing innocent people."<sup>7</sup> To Wright, white supremacy undergirds the thought, the ideology, the theology, the sociology, the legal structure, the educational system, the health care system, and the entire reality of the United States of America.<sup>8</sup>

To those who echo Wright's sentiments, the right politician would be very useful in furthering the cause of BLT. Enter Barack Obama. He has both applauded and repudiated some of Wright's inflammatory sermons. The question should be asked—does Obama approve or disapprove of Wright's theology and racism?

His relationship to his church, Trinity UCOC, and his former pastor, Jeremiah Wright, is very significant and should not be overlooked. Just because Obama called a press conference to denounce Wright's speech at the National Press Club last month does not mean that he was ignorant of his pastor's political radicalism. It should be pointed out that Obama has been a member for twenty years of a church that subscribes to BLT, which has its roots in Marxism, racism, and anti-American sentiment.

As mentioned earlier, Wright's *Trumpet* publication is being used to further the BLT movement. Having been in existence since 1982, it is inconceivable that Obama would never have seen a copy of *Trumpet* since he himself has been on the cover of the magazine in the past.<sup>9</sup> One should be concerned about such a connection when it is reported that Obama refers to his Caucasian grandmother as "a typical white person," is unwilling to wear an America flag lapel pin, and his wife says (regarding her husband's political success) that for the first time in her adult life, she is proud of her country!<sup>10</sup> Plus, it would be very understandable that Obama would endorse at least part of Wright's BLT seeing that his liberal voting record on social issues is consistent with the UCOC's stand on such issues. If the accusations are true that Obama is the most liberal person in the U.S. Senate, then he is only being consistent with his own denomination which is arguably the most liberal of all denominations.

  
“WRIGHT MAKES A CASE FOR  
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## RESPONSE

Space does not allow for a thorough critique of Wright's BLT and Obama's association, but anyone who is an American Christian regardless of race, has ample evidence for concern. What would be the Christian response? Any movement or theology that promotes racism is not biblical and neither is a movement or theology that promotes racism as a reaction to racism! "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus" (Eph.3:28, ESV). Here Paul makes it clear that Christian faith is supposed to remove racial and ethnic boundaries. However, BLT is racial by definition. Most theologians in the movement promote Jesus as a "Black Messiah," blacks as the "chosen race," and everyone must become "black" (i.e., oppressed) in order to be saved.<sup>11</sup>

According to Dwight Hopkins, a professor at the University of Chicago Divinity School, BLT insists that Scripture must be interpreted through the black experience. Luke 4:18 is a central text used by this movement. In this verse, Jesus quotes Isaiah 61:1-2: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor...to set at liberty those who are oppressed"(ESV). BLT advocates interpret this as meaning that Jesus' mission was to eradicate poverty and to bring about freedom and liberation for the oppressed. However, Jesus was not using this text for racial purposes. He was actually referring to spiritual poverty and bondage, to those who are "poor in spirit"! "Blessed are the poor in spirit for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." (Matthew 5:3) He taught that only those who acknowledge their spiritual poverty would be delivered.

Jesus never played the race card and he never "proof-texted" for racial purposes. In Christ, such distinctions are not made. Scripture teaches in Galatians 3:28 that the wall of racial barriers between Jew and Gentile is removed for those who are in Christ. There are no racial distinctions given as advantages in the matter of salvation. "For there is no distinction: for all ►



have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus” (Rom. 3:22-24 ESV).

## JESUS OR BARABBAS

Throughout the Bible and history, God has come to the aid of the oppressed in a spiritual and moral sense. This is without question. Jesus himself said, “Everyone who commits sin is a slave to sin...So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed” (John 8:34-36). But in BLT, as with certain groups in Jesus’ time, the cry is for political liberation instead of spiritual salvation.

It is no exaggeration to say that the black race has been oppressed in America. When any race or culture has seen themselves as historically oppressed, socially and economically, it is understandable they would cry out for a political liberator rather than a spiritual one, as the crowd once cried out for the release of Barabbas instead of Jesus. But any leader, like Wright, who tries to use the Bible to “damn America” is not only reading things into scripture, but usurping God’s authority. Only God himself has the right to condemn.

Not only is Rev. Wright’s extreme Afro-centric approach unbiblical but many black citizens are offended by his anti-American slurs because of their vested interest in the nation. Day Gardner, founder and president of the National Black Pro-Life Union in Washington says, “We came here as slaves, but it was our blood, sweat and tears that helped to build this country...I’m tired of being made to feel – by our own people sometimes, such as Rev. Wright – that we are disconnected from what we are. I am an American.”<sup>12</sup>

We should agree with former Assistant Secretary of State Alan Keyes who decried the whole idea that Christians would allow themselves to be defined by race. He said, “Once one has been defined by his relationship to Christ, we are to look upon all people in terms of the way God sees them...It doesn’t mean we don’t have identities, but it also wouldn’t mean that our view and understanding of everything would be characterized on the basis of race.”<sup>13</sup>

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## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Cone’s books include *Black Theology and Black Power* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1997), *God of the Oppressed* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1997), and *Risks of Faith* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1999).

<sup>2</sup> Interview of James Cone on National Public Radio ( March 31, 2008).

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>4</sup> See Trinity’s website: [www.tucc.org](http://www.tucc.org)

<sup>5</sup> Stanley Kurtz, “Jeremiah Wright’s Trumpet,” *Weekly Standard*, (May 19, 2008): 3.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>7</sup> NPR interview (March 31, 2008).

<sup>8</sup> Kurtz, “Jeremiah Wright’s Trumpet.”

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 1.

<sup>10</sup> See [www.christianactionleague.org/article/950](http://www.christianactionleague.org/article/950)

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*



# DISCERNING THE VOICE OF GOD: THE APOLOGETIC FUNCTION OF MIRACLES

{ BY STEVEN B. COWAN }

Christians believe in a miracle-working God. Since he is the sovereign creator of the physical universe and the natural laws by which it operates, we believe that there is no obstacle to his intervening in the course of world history to do spectacular, out-of-the-ordinary things that defy natural explanations. So God can do miracles if it pleases him to do so. But why would God do a miracle? In addition to our belief in God's omnipotent power, we also believe that God is a rational being, a purposeful being. He is not capricious or frivolous. This means that if he does a miracle, he will have a reason or purpose for doing so. But what reason or reasons does he have?

In this article, we will explore what the Bible has to say about the nature and purpose of miracles. We will see that one of the major reasons God has for miracles is helping human beings discern his voice when he speaks to us. That is, miracles serve a vital purpose in Christian apologetics.

## **THE NATURE AND PURPOSE OF MIRACLES<sup>1</sup>**

When the Bible speaks of miracles, it usually characterizes them as “signs” and “wonders.” Sometimes these two terms are used separately when describing miracles (Exod. 4:1-8; 11:9; John 2:11; 11:47; 20:30; et passim). On other occasions they are used together in the phrase “signs and wonders” (Exod. 7:3; Ps. 135:9; Acts 2:22, 43; 4:30; 5:12; 6:8; et passim). Sometimes one text describes a miraculous event as a “sign” and another text describes the same event as a “wonder” (cp. Exod. 4:21 and Ps. 78:43). There are a few places in the New Testament where the terms “miracle” and “signs and miracles” are used (e.g., Acts 4:16; 8:13).



The description of miracles as signs and wonders tells us something about both the nature and purpose of miracles. As Christian philosopher Norman Geisler puts it:

From the human vantage point a miracle, then, is an unusual event (“wonder”) that conveys and confirms an unusual message (“sign”) by means of unusual power. . . .From the divine vantage point a miracle is an act of God. . . .that attracts the attention of the people of God (“wonder”) to the Word of God (by a “sign”).<sup>2</sup>

Notice, first, that miracles are wonders. This means that they are spectacular, amazing events that inspire awe in those who witness them (cf. Matt. 8:27; 9:33; Mark 2:12; 5:42; Acts 5:11). They are not the kinds of things that ordinarily happen. People born blind do not normally receive their sight at the command of another person. Nor do storms cease raging when someone waves his hand. Nor do dead people come back to life after being in the grave for four days. Miracles defy the ordinary operations of nature. They do not appear to be explainable by appeal to natural laws and processes.

Second, notice again that miracles are signs. In Scripture, miracles certainly had multiple functions. For example, miracles of healing and exorcism were no doubt intended by God as acts of compassion and mercy toward the suffering. Yet, in calling miracles “signs,” the Bible makes it clear that the primary function of miracles is to draw the attention of people to the presence and activity of God. When a person witnesses a miracle, he is supposed to recognize the hand of God. This is why miracles were often designed to authenticate a prophet of God and his message. In other words, miracles provide evidence that a particular person is sent by God as his spokesman. For example, when Moses expressed concern that the Israelites might not believe that God had sent him to lead them out of Egypt, God gave Moses two miraculous signs to prove that he was indeed sent by God (Exod. 4:1-8, 29-31). Similarly, when Elijah confronted the prophets of Baal, the Lord confirmed him as the true prophet of the true God by raining fire down

from heaven (1 Kings 18:36). Nicodemus understood this function of miracles when he told Jesus, “Rabbi, we know that you have come from God as a teacher; for no one could do these signs that you do unless God is with him” (John 3:2). Jesus himself emphasized the authenticating nature of miracles when he said at the healing of the paralytic, “So that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins. . . .I say to you, get up, pick up your pallet and go home” (Mark 2:10-11). Also significant in this regard is Jesus’ response to John the Baptist when the latter came to doubt that Jesus was the Messiah. Jesus responded to John’s messengers, “Go and report to John what you have seen and heard: the blind received sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, the poor have the gospel preached to them” (Luke 7:22). Jesus appealed to Old Testament texts (esp. Isa. 35:5) which foresaw the miracles of the coming Messiah to prove to John that he was indeed the Messiah and not a counterfeit.

The apostles likewise saw Jesus’ miracles as authenticating his divine authority. John organized his entire gospel around seven miraculous signs of Jesus “so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ” (John 20:31). In his sermon on the day of Pentecost, Peter declared that Jesus was “a man attested to you by God with miracles and wonders and signs which God performed through Him in your midst” (Acts 2:22). The apostles saw their own miracles the same way. Paul spoke of apostolic miracles as the “signs of an apostle” (i.e., one who was designated by Christ as his spokesman, 2 Cor. 12:12). And the author of Hebrews asserts that Jesus’ gospel message was confirmed by the teaching of the apostles with “God also testifying with them, both by signs and wonders and by various miracles. . . .” (Heb. 2:4).

It is clear from the Bible, then, that the primary purpose of miracles was and is to provide signs that authenticate a divine revelation. By miracles human beings can know that God is making his presence known, usually for the purpose of teaching or directing his people. This means that miracles are a central part of Christian apologetics. God ►

has used miracles in the past to confirm the authority of the prophets and apostles so that we can know that the Bible is God's Word and that the Christian religion is true. This is why contemporary Christian apologists defend the possibility of miracles and attempt to demonstrate that miracles connected to the origins of the Christian faith (e.g., the resurrection of Jesus) really happened. In making such a defense we provide grounds to believe that Christianity is true—it's true because it is authenticated by miraculous signs and wonders that only God can do.

### **CAN MIRACLES PRODUCE SAVING FAITH?**

The fact that miracles play a role in showing that Christianity is true might raise the question as to whether or not miracles can produce saving faith. That is, would those who witness miracles—or otherwise know that they have occurred—necessarily respond to the gospel in faith and repentance? The answer is no. The Bible makes it clear that fallen human beings can be exposed to the most amazing miracles of God and fail to come to faith in Christ. Pharaoh, for example, stubbornly refused to believe in the face of ten devastating plagues sent by God. The Pharisees of Jesus' day resisted the authenticating power of his miracles by attributing them to Satan (Matt. 12:24). In his Parable of Lazarus and the Rich Man (Luke 16:19-31), Jesus indicated that the unregenerate "will not be persuaded even if someone rises from the dead." So miracles by themselves are incapable of producing saving faith.

What good are miracles in apologetics, then? If they cannot produce faith, what is the use of appealing to them in our evangelism and apologetics? In answering this question it is important to keep in mind what we have already seen. God did give his prophets and apostles miracles as signs pointing to the truth of the Christian faith. Jesus was attested by signs and wonders, Peter said at Pentecost. Moses was given miraculous signs so that the Israelites would believe that God sent him. So, it is clear from Scripture that miracles function as authenticating signs that evidence the truth of Christianity. We can say, then,

that miracles ought to persuade people to believe if they could see them with unbiased, objective minds. The problem, according to Scripture, is that such objectivity is impossible for fallen humans apart from the work of the Holy Spirit (cf. 1 Cor. 2:14). Those who refuse to accept the testimony of God's miracles are sometimes even described as "blind" (cf. John 9:39-41; 13:37-41). So, even though miracles do attest the truth of Christianity, fallen sinners, left to themselves, will reject their testimony by "suppressing the truth in unrighteousness" (Rom. 1: 18). The problem is not with the evidence God provides through miracles, but with the unregenerate human heart.

With all this said, however, we should also note that many people in the Bible did come to believe on the basis of miracles (cf. Exod. 4:30-31; Luke 7:18-23; John 11:45; Acts 2:40-41; 8:6-8). So, on the one hand, Scripture indicates that miracles cannot produce saving faith because fallen men and women are spiritually blind and hard-hearted. But, on the other hand, we see some sinners coming to faith in Christ because they witnessed a miracle. How are we to understand this? The only plausible conclusion seems to be that in some cases, the testimony of a miracle is accompanied by the work of the Holy Spirit in opening blind eyes. This fact ought to give the Christian apologist confidence as he appeals to the evidence for biblical miracles in seeking to persuade people to believe the gospel. Even though the evidence alone will not produce saving faith, often God is pleased to use the evidence as part of the means by which he draws sinners to Christ.

### **DON'T OTHER RELIGIONS APPEAL TO MIRACLES?**

A strong critic of miracles was the 18th-century Scottish philosopher David Hume. He offered some reasons why people should not believe that a miracle has occurred. Most of these reasons were philosophical in nature and we will not address them here.<sup>3</sup> However, Hume made one objection to miracles that is directly relevant to their apologetic function as outlined above.

Hume noted that many world religions claim ►

miracles as part of their traditions of belief. For example, Muslims claim that Muhammad once split the moon in half. He is also said to have healed broken legs and made miraculous provisions of food and water. Some Buddhists believe that Gautama (the original Buddha) once rose into the air shooting fire and water out of his body. Other religions contain similar miracle stories. This being so, Hume claimed, it would seem that miracle-claims in the world's religions cancel each other out when they are used (as in the Bible) to authenticate religious beliefs. In his own words, Hume said, "All the prodigies [i.e., miracles] of different religions are to be regarded as contrary facts, and the evidences of these prodigies, whether strong or weak, as opposite to each other."<sup>4</sup> In other words, if miracles support many religions, then they really don't support any religion.

What can we say in response to this argument? The most significant problem with it is that it assumes that all miracle-claims are equally well-evidenced. Yet, it is certainly possible that the miracle-claims of one religion are far better supported by evidence than others.<sup>5</sup> On the one hand, the miracle-claims in non-Christian religions are almost entirely unsupported by historical evidence. For example, the miracles attributed to Muhammad do not occur in the Islamic tradition until many years after his death. What's more, Muhammad himself denied that he performed miracles. In the Qur'an, Muhammad declared, "Signs are with Allah only, and I am only a plain warner" (Surah 29:50). Likewise, the miracle stories surrounding the Buddha developed long after his lifetime, and the Buddha's own teaching (e.g., that all of reality is materialistic) does not allow even for the possibility of miracles. So, miracle stories in non-Christian religions have very little going for them. They are not believable.

On the other hand, the evidence for the veracity of at least some of the biblical miracles is quite strong. In fact, the central miracle of the Christian faith—the resurrection of Jesus—is supported enough by historical evidence for us to confidently say that its occurrence is more probable than not, perhaps even beyond a reasonable doubt.<sup>6</sup> So, Hume

is simply incorrect when he says that miracle-claims in the world's religions cancel each other out. Whether or not that is true depends upon how strong the evidence is for competing miracle-claims. And a case can and has been made by Christian apologists that Christian miracle-claims are superior to those in other faiths.

## CONCLUSION

We have seen that miracles play a crucial role in Christian apologetics. God has used them (perhaps still uses them) as signs for finite human beings to discern his voice among the cacophony of counterfeits that have existed in the world. Miracles are wonders that can only be performed by the Creator of nature. When we witness a miracle or have adequate testimony to the occurrence of a miracle, and that miracle accompanies a claim to divine revelation, then we can know that it is God's voice that we hear.

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## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Some of the material in this section is adapted from George Kurian, ed. *The Encyclopedia of Christian Civilization* (Oxford: Blackwell, forthcoming), s.v. "Miracles," by Steven B. Cowan.

<sup>2</sup> Norman L. Geisler, *Miracles and the Modern Mind: A Defense of Biblical Miracles* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1992), 98-99.

<sup>3</sup> For a discussion and response to Hume's primary philosophical arguments against miracles, see Winfried Corduan, "Miracles and their Omniscient Critics," elsewhere in this issue of *Areopagus Journal*.

<sup>4</sup> David Hume, *An Inquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, 10.2.130.

<sup>5</sup> For a detailed discussion of this response to Hume see David K. Clark, "Miracles in the World's Religions," in *In Defense of Miracles*, eds. R. Douglas Geivett and Gary Habermas (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1997), 199-213.

<sup>6</sup> For thorough presentations of the evidence for Jesus' resurrection see, William Lane Craig, *The Son Rises: The Historical Evidence for the Resurrection of Jesus* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 1981); Gary R. Habermas and Michael R. Licona, *The Case of the Resurrection of Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2004); and N.T. Wright, *The Resurrection of the Son of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2003); and (at a more popular level), Steven B. Cowan, "The Resurrection of Jesus: Hoax or History?" *Areopagus Journal* 3:4 (July-August 2003): 16-23.

WHERE IS THE

MIRACLES AND THEIR OMNISCIENT CRITICS

{ BY WINFRIED CORDUAN }



# PROBLEM?

Let me begin by asking naively: Where is the problem with miracles?<sup>1</sup> A miracle seems to be a fairly straightforward event, the occurrence of something so unusual that the most likely explanation is that God intervened directly. The event could be considered unusual because it seems to go contrary to nature or because it resulted from a highly improbable combination of other events. Together with a setting that makes it plausible that God himself has acted, it seems to make sense to say that there was a miracle. Specifically, Christians believe that there are miraculous events recorded in the Bible, and they fit nicely into this pattern.<sup>2</sup>

Obviously, there are questions left. We might want to clarify more of what makes an event sufficiently unusual, and when it makes sense to invoke God as agent. People who believe in miracles still may disagree concerning the interpretation of specific events.

Nevertheless, critics<sup>3</sup> are raising far more fundamental issues. They are denying that:

- ▶ miracles are possible,
- ▶ we can know that miracles have occurred, or
- ▶ we would ever be able to recognize a specific event as a miracle.

Maintaining my naïve stance a little longer, I could respond by saying that:

- ▶ given an omnipotent God, miracles are certainly possible,
- ▶ we can know that miracles have occurred if we ourselves have seen them or have been provided plausible testimony to them, and
- ▶ we can recognize a miracle if the circumstances are sufficiently unusual and it makes sense to infer that God was the agent.

Please note that I'm not making the mistake of using God to establish the reality of miracles and then using miracles to establish the existence of God. Belief in God is already a part of my worldview, and if challenged on it I would refer to some other grounds, say, the cosmological argument, but not to any miracles. ▶

But enough of the naïveté. If things were that simple, there would not be any critics. They must know something to which simple believers are not privy, so let us try to pinpoint how the critic may have an edge on the believer in miracles. We shall begin with a supposition that seems to be somewhat peculiar.

### **1. THE CRITIC IS OMNISCIENT, AND HE KNOWS INFALLIBLY THAT MIRACLES ARE IMPOSSIBLE.**

If this were a genuine possibility, it would certainly clinch the issue on the side of the critic once and for all. I must confess that sometimes when I read objections to miracles, I get the feeling that this mind-set is really behind what a critic is writing. Even though he may engage in apparent argumentation, the arguments are so unrealistic that it seems as though the critic is only attempting to illustrate the absurdity of something that he already knows apart from any evidence. And in order for him to know this fact a priori, he must be omniscient.

I'm thinking here, for example, of Evan Fales<sup>4</sup>, who has stated that he would be willing to accept the reality of a miracle if all of the stars in the sky arranged themselves into the apparent writing "Mene Mene Tekel Upharsin," or if some other, equally stupendous, event would occur. (Apparently the resurrection of Christ is not sufficient.) Such a requirement is surely quite unreasonable, and he is apparently picking an absurd example because he already knows that neither this, nor any other event sufficiently acceptable to him, will ever happen.

Still, I'm quite sure that, if pressed on the matter, Fales would vehemently deny any claims to omniscience, and I suspect the same thing is true for other critics. So, how else can the critic know that miracles are impossible?


### **2. A CRITIC KNOWS FROM SCIENCE THAT MIRACLES ARE IMPOSSIBLE.**

A number of people believe that somehow science has established the impossibility of miracles. As an example, the 20th-century New Testament scholar Rudolf Bultmann

declared that in the age of electric light bulbs, the radio, and modern medical knowledge, it is no longer possible to accept a supernatural worldview.<sup>5</sup> He must be referring to a scientific discovery that makes it possible to determine retroactively that historical miracles either did not happen or that provides an alternative, non-supernatural explanation of the events.

But what could that scientific discovery be? For example, assuming the truth of the biblical accounts, there is no scientific way of explaining how Jesus turned water into wine. If there are medical explanations for how Jesus restored a blind man's sight or how he resurrected Lazarus, we do not have such information now any more than people did in the first century A.D. Of course, writers who take this line would not accept these stories as true, precisely because they include miracles. But what does that have to do with science? The notion of our being able to listen to the radio today somehow invalidating the possibility of miracles is as big a mystery to me as the supernatural may be to others.

Perhaps I am missing the point by looking at specific examples rather than the possibility of miracles in general. Have there been decisive experiments to prove that miracles are impossible? There have not been any, nor is it conceivable that there could be any. Ironically, there is an asymmetry here by which a scientist could very well conclude that a given event was a miracle. As we defined a miracle above, it is a free act by a personal being, namely God, and there is no formula to predict that, if we bring certain circumstances together, we can expect to see a miracle. The miracles that concern us the most, the biblical miracles, are ones

  
"THERE IS NO  
FORMULA TO PREDICT  
THAT . . . WE CAN  
EXPECT TO SEE  
A MIRACLE"





that no human being could coerce or predict. Thus, the critic who takes this line already knows scientific conclusions apart from scientific evidence. This is quite a feat—unless he is omniscient. But since that is not an option, we must look further.

### **3. THE CRITIC KNOWS THAT IT IS CONTRARY TO GOD'S NATURE FOR HIM TO PERFORM MIRACLES.**

This line of argumentation was particularly popular among the deists of a few centuries ago.<sup>6</sup> They reason that God is a rational being, who created a rational universe, which includes rational law; therefore, if God were to override any of the laws that he had created, he would be contradicting himself.

There are two problems with this particular supposition. First, it ignores the fact that by stipulating God as Creator of the universe, the critic is already acknowledging a very profound miracle. Few laws of nature are as foundational as the notion that something cannot come from nothing; therefore, when God created the world *ex nihilo*, he was already superseding one of the most basic laws of all of reality. Of course, the deistic critic may claim that God did this one and only miracle, but that it would be contradictory for him to perform any further miracles.<sup>2</sup> However, how did the critic come by that insight? It certainly cannot be derived from revealed Scriptures, because revelation would be considered supernatural, and furthermore, the Scriptures portray a miracle-working God. Thus, the critic who follows this deistic line against miracles must have direct insight into the mind of God apart from revelation. But in order for the critic to have that kind of a mind meld with the omniscient God, he would again need to be omniscient himself, and, once more, this is not an option.

### **4. THE CRITIC KNOWS THAT ONE CANNOT KNOW THAT A MIRACLE HAS OCCURRED.**

This objection does not completely deny the possibility of miracles, but it claims that, even if by a remote chance a miracle had happened, we should never be able to know that it did happen.

This line of thought was advocated by the

Scottish philosopher David Hume who argued that no rational person could ever give credence to accounts of miracles because of their low probability of being true.<sup>1</sup> Hume claimed that the highest probability of truth goes to statements affirming the laws of nature. We have never observed the laws of nature to fail, and, since miracles would be violations of these laws, the truth probability of a statement narrating a miracle would be at the lowest level.

Being low on probability is not devastating until Hume has us establish a contrast: Which is more likely—that a law of nature has been violated or that a human being made an error in judgment? Any rational person, hearing the account of a miracle, will have to choose between these two alternatives. We know that human beings often make mistakes, even people of high character and great virtue. But we ourselves have never experienced an exception to the laws of nature. Consequently, a rational person, choosing between whether a miracle really has happened or whether the alleged witness may be mistaken, will have to go with the second option. No matter how trustworthy the testimony of a witness may be *per se*, rationality still demands that we assume human error rather than forfeit our confidence in the uniformity of the laws of nature. Therefore, even if a miracle had occurred, a rational person should never be able to believe an alleged witness to a miracle.

But how rational is Hume's supposedly rational person who cannot bring himself to believe miracle reports? He has to bring a whole lot more to the table than just incredulity concerning highly improbable events. After all, a believer in miracles does not claim that a miracle just happened; he believes that God, the infinite Creator and Sustainer of the universe, has intervened directly in the course of events. Thus, for the believer, the probability of events occurring on an everyday basis has nothing to do with the probability of a miracle occurring when God decides to bring one about. Miracles are done by God, and they are supposed to be highly unusual events that defy our common experiences in the world. When Hume adds up his probabilities, he has to leave God out of the ►

equation, and in doing so, he has to redefine what a believer means by a miracle.

The critic who wants to pursue this line of argumentation has to be certain that there is no God, and, more specifically, that there is no deity of any description who performs miracles. Furthermore, this critic must be absolutely certain that no evidence can ever be so strong as to override the probability of a person having made a mistake. He has to be totally confident that he himself will never be a witness to a miracle or, if he did think that he saw one, he must dismiss the trustworthiness of his own observations because he knows a priori that it could not have happened. Once again, we see the critic giving himself privileged knowledge that exceeds the capacity of normal human beings. In other words, to be completely confident of Hume's argument against the knowability of miracles, one has to be omniscient. But we have already agreed that the critic would not claim omniscience for himself. Therefore, Hume's argument is not really viable, and once again, we need to consider another option.

### **5. THE CRITIC KNOWS THAT UNUSUAL EVENTS CAN NEVER BE EXPLAINED SCIENTIFICALLY AS MIRACLES.**

This supposition is different from the earlier one because it does not deny that events happen which untutored folks could label as miraculous, but claims that science, the objective method of attaining knowledge, would never allow such labeling. Let us proceed even more carefully, then, and stipulate that highly unusual events can occur, that these events may even be inexplicable on scientific grounds, but that such occurrences still do not legitimize our thinking of them as miracles. This is the approach taken by Antony Flew, who argued that it is simply contrary to the nature of science to allow for the intrusion of the supernatural into the natural world.<sup>9</sup> Science is by its very nature committed to confining itself to natural explanations. If scientists could bring in supernatural explanations whenever they were stumped, scientific research would not likely make much progress. To invoke the "god-of-the-gaps" is all-too-easy. Consequently, if

we do run across unusual events, even ones that other people may label as miracles, and even if we have no scientific explanation for them right now, science forces us to stipulate that there must be a natural explanation, and that we simply have not found it yet.

It is certainly the case that science would be utterly trivialized if, whenever things got too difficult, we immediately invoked the supernatural. However, the ultimate purpose of science is to describe reality, not just reality as presupposed by the scientist. If reality includes God and his actions in the universe, then science needs to be prepared to take that factor into account. Of course, a scientist should never stray from relying on evidence, and if he concludes that an event is a miracle, he must have firm grounds on which to base this judgment. But to say that all events in the universe must be natural and to exclude miracles from scientific conclusions a priori, is an arbitrary pre-judgment of the data. Sometimes the most reasonable explanation is that a miracle has occurred.

Please note that in saying this, I am not relegating miracles to the category of the last option when all other explanations have failed. There may be events that are so obviously the result of God's action that calling them miracles would be among the most likely explanations. Take for example Christ's raising of Lazarus from the dead. When Jesus said, "Lazarus, come forth!" and Lazarus came out of his tomb, the most reasonable explanation was that Christ had just performed a miracle. Everything in this scenario points us to the idea that Jesus performed a stupendous miracle here, and the onus of contriving a naturalistic explanation would be on the critic. Rather than a "God-in-the-gaps" theory, the critic would be holding to a "nature in the gaps" theory.

Thus, this entire position is based, not on a given reality, but on a choice made by its advocate. You can decide that by its very nature science cannot accommodate miracles, but you cannot learn that by scientific means. And why would anyone decide to hold this position other than as an arbitrary assertion? The only possible grounds would be that the critic of this stripe already knows that there ▶

cannot be events that are most amenable to scientific explanation as miracles. In short, if it is not an arbitrary presupposition, then this supposition, too, must, once again, be based on the critic's omniscience.

## **6. THE CRITIC KNOWS THAT CALLING AN EVENT A MIRACLE IS NOT TO PROVIDE AN EXPLANATION OF THE EVENT.**

Our last example seeks to empty the concept of "miracle" of any meaning. Patrick Nowell-Smith<sup>1</sup> claims that, given the nature of what it means to explain an event, calling an event a miracle can never be considered as a meaningful explanation. The whole point of giving an explanation for anything is that we take an unfamiliar phenomenon and align it with a rule for similar, familiar phenomena. For example, we can explain why steam is coming out of a kettle right now by clarifying that this is just one instance of water being brought to a boil, and whenever water is brought to a boil, then it releases steam. But if we try to explain an event as a miracle, we find ourselves caught in a dilemma. Either there is a general rule, in which case the miracle is actually just an ordinary event, or there is no general rule, in which case calling the event a "miracle" provides no explanation. To explain an event as "miracle," we must be able to show a uniform pattern according to which, whenever certain events come together, a miracle occurs. Consequently, explaining an event as a miracle would require a certain amount of predictability, just as creating steam with boiling water is a predictable process. However, Nowell-Smith contends that it is not possible to predict the occurrence of miracles since by their very nature miracles are unique events that defy the regularity of the natural world and cannot be predicted to happen. Even if someone were to pray right now, and God would send a miracle, there is no guarantee that the same prayer under similar circumstances would yield the identical miracle. Thus, still following Nowell-Smith's line of argument, miracles are cognitively meaningless. To say of any event that it constitutes a miracle, may look grammatically as though we are providing an explanation for the event, but,

given the nature of explanation, we are really not explaining anything.

This supposition demonstrates that Nowell-Smith has not grasped how believers understand miracles. We have here a confusion between miracles and magic. In the language of comparative religion, magic consists of manipulating spiritual forces in order to bring about a certain result. If one follows the correct technique, magical results will follow. However, there certainly is no overlap between miracles and magic when it comes to the historical miracles that are the object of our discussion. It is neither nature, nor the human person, nor a specific technique used by the person that causes a miracle to happen. In the believer's view of miracles, a miracle is always a free act of God to supersede the laws of nature or the expectations of probability in his good time for his own reasons. How predictable can free acts on the part of a free being be? Even for human beings, determinism regarding their actions is more likely *ex post facto* than predictive. Perhaps for a human agent it is possible to say that, if we knew everything relevant about that person, and all of the circumstances of a particular action, then we could have predicted what the person was going to do. For example, a person who knows me well enough would probably be right in predicting that on Wednesdays during the fall semester I'm going to teach my logic class. However, it's going to be extremely difficult, if not impossible, to get more specific, and we're still only talking about the ordinary actions of an ordinary human being.

However, if miracles are the actions of a free God, then there is no predictability. God has given certain promises (John 1:13) and even certain prophecies (2 Timothy 1:14), which we can trust. However, in order to be able to predict when and how God is going to do a miracle, we would need to be thoroughly acquainted with God's mind. The whole point of a miracle is that God has broken with the uniformity of nature and that his actions supersede the so-called laws of nature. Thus, a miracle is always a singularity, and there are no grounds for prediction or for providing an explanation by means of a general rule. But this doesn't mean that they are not explanatory. ►

Just as we may meaningfully appeal to the action of a finite human agent in explaining some event, it is meaningful to appeal to the actions of an infinite agent.

Nowell-Smith's target is not a believer's understanding of miracles, but a straw man, which believers in miracles should reject out of hand. Given his definition of miracles, Nowell-Smith must be able to do what no person has done before, namely, to predict in precise details all of the actions of a free agent, and to do this not just for a finite human being, but for the infinite, omniscient, and omnipotent creator of the universe. Once more, we find a critic seeking to understand an omniscient being's mind, which is only possible if the critic himself is omniscient.

As should be apparent now, the critic of miracles finds himself in a quandary. He cannot just claim that miracles are impossible because to do so would require him to be omniscient. So, he must find some specific reason why miracles, even if they were possible, could not be known to have happened or recognized as such by rational persons. Unfortunately, any of the options proposed ultimately still come down to the assumption that the critic must know more than a human being is actually able to know.

To conclude, a believer in miracles makes a very simple claim, namely, that an omnipotent God has acted directly inside of the world that he created. Whether there actually are instances of such divine actions depends on the evidence and on what God has revealed to us. However, the critic who denies the possibility of miracles needs to go beyond the evidence and make claims to which he would be entitled only if he actually were omniscient. It seems more reasonable to say that, since we're not omniscient, we should retain an open mind to what God may have done in the world he created.

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## NOTES

<sup>1</sup>For some solid defenses of miracles see: Colin Brown, *Miracles and the Critical Mind* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1984); Norman L. Geisler, *Miracles and the Modern Mind* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Book House, 1992); R. Douglas Geivett and Gary R. Habermas, eds., *In Defense of Miracles* (Downers Grove, Ill.: Intervarsity Press, 1997); C. S. Lewis, *Miracles* (New York: Collier, 1947).

<sup>2</sup>I have previously addressed the issue of miracles in several places. Reasonable Faith (recently retitled: No Doubt About It; Nashville: Broadman-Holman, 1993), 146-164; "Recognizing a Miracle" in Geivett and Habermas, *In Defense of Miracles*, 99-111; "Miracles" in Beckwith, Craig and Moreland, *To Everyone an Answer* (Downers Grove, Ill: Intervarsity, 2004), 160-179.

<sup>3</sup>By "critic" I mean someone who takes a negative stance towards the reality of miracles. As we shall see, there are a variety of different ways in which this can occur. What it comes down to is that a critic is someone who denies the reality of the historical miracles as recorded in the Bible on philosophical grounds.

<sup>4</sup>Evan Fales, "Successful Defense? A Review of *In Defense of Miracles*." *Philosophia Christi Series 2*, 3:1 (2001):13.

<sup>5</sup>Rudolf Bultmann, *Kerygma and Myth* (New York: Harper & Row, 1961; orig. 1953), 5.

<sup>6</sup>E.g. Peter Annet, who wrote: "God has settled the laws of nature by His wisdom and power, and therefore cannot alter them consistently with His Perfections." *Supernatural Examined*, 1747, 44, cited in Brown, *Miracles and the Critical Mind*, 54.

<sup>7</sup>Please note that this is a very different position from saying that God has simply chosen not to perform any further miracles. That idea would not be contradictory, but it is also not what deistic critics are claiming.

<sup>8</sup>David Hume, *An Inquiry Concerning Human Understanding* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1955, orig. 1748), 117-41.

<sup>9</sup>Antony Flew, *God and Philosophy* (New York: Delta, 1966), pp. 140-58, and Flew, "Miracles" in *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. by Paul Edwards (New York: Macmillan, 1967):346-53.

<sup>10</sup>Patrick Nowell-Smith, "Miracles" in *Antony Flew and Alasdair MacIntyre, New Essays in Philosophical Theology* (London: SCM, 1955), 243-53.

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# POINT/COUNTERPOINT: DO MIRACLES THE CASE FOR CESSATIONISM

{ BY SAMUEL E. WALDRON }

You have seen those odd pictures where it looks like the outline of an old man smoking a pipe, but from another perspective it appears to be the profile of a beautiful woman. Look at the Cessationist position from a certain perspective, and it seems eccentric. Bloesch can say: “With the mainstream of catholic tradition I contend that all of the charisms belong to the wider ministry of the church in every generation.”<sup>1</sup> This makes Cessationism look ugly. Where do those Cessationists get off any way—denying the sovereignty of God in the world, refusing to take seriously the Bible they say they believe, and going against the mainstream and catholic tradition of the church?

## THE PRESUMPTION OF THE ARGUMENT

But Bloesch goes on to make this revealing statement: “Some have fallen into eclipse, but not because the gifts have ceased with the passing of the apostolic church.”<sup>2</sup> Note the phrase, “apostolic church.” Bloesch distinguishes the apostolic church from the church today. Sam Storms would allow a similar distinction (Eph. 2:20). From this perspective Cessationism looks more normal. Is there a distinction between the apostolic church and the contemporary church? What is it? Might it be that there are no Apostles of Christ today? Many Continuationists affirm this, and the Bible is very clear about it. This makes Cessationism look normal, mainstream, and catholic. Once you admit that there are no more Apostles of Christ—like John, Peter, and Paul—in the world today, then in some way and to some degree you are a Cessationist! You may not believe in the cessation of prophecy or tongues-speaking, but you do believe in the cessation of the Apostles, and this makes you a Cessationist. Thus, Cessationism is not so crazy after all.

Not only have you admitted the cessation of one spiritual gift, but you have admitted the cessation of the first and greatest spiritual gift. Thus, you have removed all reason for presumption against Cessationism. Now the possibility of the cessation of other spiritual gifts looks reasonable, because everybody (except those who argue that Apostles like the Twelve and Paul are in the world today) already admits that the

*Please continue on page 24*



# ACULOUS GIFTS EXIST TODAY? THE CASE FOR CONTINUATIONISM

{ BY C. SAMUEL STORMS }

In view of the constraints on space, I'm going to forego any introductory comments and come straight to the point. I propose to articulate what I consider to be seven good reasons for believing in the continuation of all spiritual gifts in the church today. These aren't the only reasons, but they are the best.

## **BAD REASONS FOR BEING A CESSATIONIST**

The first good reason for being a Continuationist is the numerous bad reasons for being a Cessationist. For example, even most Cessationists now agree that the "perfect" in 1 Corinthians 13:10 cannot be a reference to the canon of Scripture or the alleged maturity of the church in the first century, but clearly refers to the fullness of the eternal state ushered in at the second coming of Christ.

Contrary to what many Cessationists have said, signs, wonders, and spiritual gifts don't authenticate the apostles, but rather Jesus and the apostolic message about him. Furthermore, nowhere does the NT say that authentication or attestation was the sole or exclusive purpose of such displays of divine power. These supernatural phenomena also serve to glorify God (John 2:11; 9:3; 11:4, 40; Mt. 15: 29-31) to evangelize the lost (Acts 9:32-43), to display love and compassion for the hurting (Mt. 14:14; Mk. 1:40-41), and to build up the body of Christ (1 Cor. 12:7; 14:3-5, 26). Even if the ministry of the miraculous gifts to attest and authenticate has ceased (a point I concede only for the sake of argument), such gifts would continue to function in the church for the other reasons cited.

Some have pointed to 2 Corinthians 12:12, where Paul asserts that "the signs of a true apostle were performed among you with all perseverance, by signs and wonders and miracles" (NASB). He does not say the insignia or marks of an apostle are signs, wonders and miracles, but rather that miraculous phenomena accompanied his ministry in Corinth as attendant elements in his apostolic work. They were not themselves "signs" performed exclusively by apostles.

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greatest gift has ceased. The issue is not, then, Cessationism, but rather how far Cessationism should go.

Continuationists respond to this by saying “strictly speaking, to be an Apostle is an office, not a gift.”<sup>3</sup> Yet in the key passages on this subject, Paul does not maintain the distinction upon which such a Continuationist insists. Ephesians 4:11, for instance, identifies the gifts Christ gives to men as apostles, prophets, evangelists, and pastor-teachers. Similarly in 1 Corinthians 12:28-29 apostles, prophets, and teachers occur in lists of what are evidently gifts.

### THE OVERVIEW OF THE ARGUMENT

Before I come to focus on the linchpin of my argument, let me overview my argument against the continuation of the miraculous gifts. The New Testament makes clear that Apostles of Christ are not given to the church today. They lived only in the first century A. D. We know for sure, therefore, that one gift, the greatest gift, has ceased to be given. This clear New Testament teaching provides a vital premise for the argument against Continuationism. Unless it wishes to contradict the plainest evidence, Continuationism cannot claim that there is no difference in the gifts given today and the gifts given in the first century.

Prophets in the Old Testament were a clearly identified and regulated institution that contributed prominently to the formation of the Old Testament canon. There is no reason to think New Testament prophecy is fundamentally different than Old Testament prophecy. There is, in fact, every reason to think it is fundamentally the same. Since biblical prophets were foundational (Eph. 2:20), infallible, and canonical, prophecy has ceased.

Tongues-speaking is substantially equivalent to prophecy according to the New Testament. According to 1 Corinthians 14:5 tongues plus interpretation equals prophecy. As such, tongues-speaking—like prophecy—has ceased.

Miracle-workers performed miraculous signs to vindicate the divine authority of their messages. It is impossible, therefore, to

think there are miracle-workers today without supposing they are either apostles or prophets bringing inspired messages. Since we have already concluded that the miraculous gifts of apostles and prophets have ceased, we must also conclude that Christ no longer gives miracle-workers to the church. This assertion, however, does not require the conclusion that God Himself does no miracles today.

### THE LINCHPIN OF THE ARGUMENT ARE THERE APOSTLES TODAY?

#### The Biblical Definition of Apostles

Fundamental to everything else is the meaning of apostle. An apostle is a sent one. Both Hebrew and Greek derive apostle from the verb that means to send. The Aramaic word, *sjaliach*, sent one, had attained a very specific meaning. “Recent research has shown that the formal structure of the apostolate is derived from the Jewish legal system in which a person may be given the legal power to represent another. The one who has such power of attorney is called a *Sjaliach* (apostle). The uniqueness of this relationship is pregnantly expressed by the notion that the *Sjaliach* (apostle) of a man, is as the man himself.”<sup>4</sup>

*Apostle* in the New Testament possesses a similar meaning. Jesus Christ was his Father’s Apostle (Heb. 3:1-2). What Jesus said, His Father said (John 14:6-10). Similarly, the Twelve are His Apostles (John 20:21). To receive Christ’s Apostle is to receive Him (Matt. 10:40; John 13:20). Therefore, an apostle was one’s legal representative.

#### The Necessary Distinction Regarding Apostles

If an apostle is one’s legal representative, then the authority of the office depends on whose representative one is. The representative of the President of the United States possesses great authority. My representative possesses very little. Both representatives would be apostles, but their apostolic authority would differ greatly because of whom they represent.

When people ask, “Are there apostles today?” the response must be, Apostles of whom? We must distinguish in the New



Testament between those who were Apostles of Christ and those who were simply apostles of the churches (Phil. 2:25; 2 Cor. 8:23.) Apostles of churches do exist today. A missionary or a representative sent to an associational meeting might both be apostles of a church.

**The Indispensable Characteristics of Apostles**

In the New Testament, there are at least three indispensable characteristics of an Apostle of Christ.

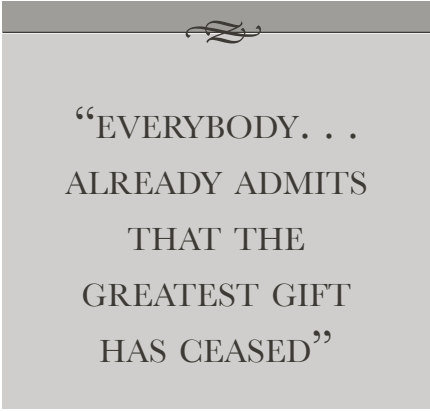
1. *An Eye-witness of the Resurrected Christ.* An Apostle of Christ had to be an eye-witness of the resurrected Christ (Acts 1:22; 10:39-41; 1 Cor. 9:1). The eyes in question were physical eyes. Even Paul—the untimely born Apostle of Christ (1 Cor. 15:8)—could claim to have seen the resurrected Christ with his physical eyes. The Old Testament distinguished between Moses and the prophets. God, in Numbers 12:5-8, emphasizes the dignity of Moses as compared to even prophets by emphasizing the difference between the “visions” of the prophet and Moses who with physical eyes saw “the form of the Lord.” Visions and dreams do not qualify one to be an Apostle of Christ.

2. *Directly Appointed by Jesus Christ.* An Apostle of Christ had to be directly appointed by Jesus Christ. Not even the other Apostles of Christ were competent to select an Apostle of Christ. Only Christ Himself can give someone His power of attorney—make someone His *sjaliach*. Explicit notice is taken in two of the gospels and twice in Acts that Christ Himself chose His Apostles. This is the reason for Paul’s insistence that he was chosen to be an Apostle by Christ Himself (Mark 3:14; Luke 6:13; Acts 1:2; 10:41 Gal. 1:1). This necessity is the reason for the strange approach to replacing the fallen Judas Iscariot in Acts 1:24-26. They cast lots to determine whom Christ had chosen.

3. *The Ability to Confirm His Mission by*

*Miraculous Signs.* An Apostle of Christ was given the ability to confirm his mission by miraculous signs. The record of their calling in the Gospel of Matthew associates miracle-working with their office (Matt. 10:1; 2; Acts 1:5-8; 2:43; 4:33; 5:12; Acts 8:14). This is why Paul can say, “The signs of a true apostle were performed among you with all perseverance, by signs and wonders and miracles” (2 Cor. 12:12)

The first problem with many, self-proclaimed Apostles of Christ today is that they cannot produce the required qualifications.



**The Messianic Authority of Apostles**

The Apostles of Christ were as the man himself. It follows that what they said and did as apostles, Jesus said and did. Paul affirms in 1 Corinthians 14:37, 38: “If anyone thinks he is a prophet or spiritual,

let him recognize that the things which I write to you are the Lord’s commandment. But if anyone does not recognize this, he is not recognized” (cf. also 2 Cor. 13:3 and 1 John 4:4-6). To reject His Apostle is to reject Christ (Matt. 10:40; John 13:20). If anyone today professes to be an Apostle, he must be ready to affirm possession of such authority that to reject him is to reject Christ.

**The Historical Limitations of the Apostolate**

There are five reasons why there cannot be Apostles of Christ today. (1) The Apostles of Christ are the foundation of the church (Eph. 2:20; Matt. 16:18; Rev. 21:14). (2) The Apostle Paul explicitly states that he was the last eyewitness of Christ’s resurrection and the last Apostle of Christ to be appointed (1 Cor. 15:5-9). (3) The Apostle Paul clearly implies that the gift of being an Apostle of Christ is no longer to be sought by Christians (1 Cor. 12:31; 14:1). (4) No modern apostle is capable of receiving the commendation of the original twelve apostles as Paul did for his apostolate (Gal. 2:7-9). (5) The final witness

to the closed character of the apostolate is the closed character of the canon. Apostolic authorship or endorsement was necessary to attain canonical authority. Since no book has been recognized as canonical since the Early Church, the plain implication is that the apostolic authority necessary has not been available.

### CONCLUDING IMPLICATION

There is one gift which we know cannot be possessed today—the gift of Apostle of Christ. When we remember that being an Apostle of Christ was the first and most important gift, we can only conclude there is a significant difference between the church of the New Testament and the church today. We must also consider the possibility that the cessation of the apostolate means the cessation of the other miraculous gifts.

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### NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Donald Bloesch, *The Holy Spirit: Works and Gifts* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000), 294.

<sup>2</sup> Bloesch, *The Holy Spirit*, 294.

<sup>3</sup> Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 1020.

<sup>4</sup> Herman Ridderbos, *Redemptive History and the New Testament Scriptures*, 2nd rev. ed. (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1988) 14.

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Others contend that since we now have the completed canon of Scripture we no longer need the operation of so-called miraculous gifts. But no biblical author ever claims that Scripture has replaced or supplanted the need for signs, wonders and the like. Furthermore, if such supernatural phenomena were essential in bearing witness to the truth of the gospel then, why not now? The miracles which confirmed the gospel in the first century would serve no less to confirm the gospel in subsequent centuries, even our own.

We mustn't forget that Jesus thought it necessary to utilize the miraculous phenomena of the Holy Spirit to attest and confirm his ministry. If it was important for him, how much more so for us. If the glorious presence of the Son of God himself did not preclude the need for miraculous phenomena, how can we suggest that our possession of the Bible does?

Some claim that if one spiritual gift, such as apostleship, has ceased to be operative in the church, perhaps other (even all) miraculous gifts have ceased to be operative. But there is serious doubt that "apostleship" is a spiritual gift. Even if it is, there is nothing inconsistent about acknowledging that one gift might have ceased while others continue. If you can make an exegetical case for the cessation of apostleship, fine (although I don't believe you can). But then you must proceed and make an equally persuasive exegetical case for the cessation of other gifts.

Others fear that to acknowledge the contemporary validity of revelatory gifts such as prophecy and word of knowledge would necessarily undermine the finality and sufficiency of Holy Scripture. This argument is based on the false assumption that such revelatory gifts provide us with infallible truths that are equal in authority to the biblical text itself.

Nor can one appeal to Ephesians 2:20 on the assumption that a gift such as prophecy was uniquely linked to the apostles and therefore designed to function only during the so-called foundational period in the early church. There are numerous instances in the NT where prophecy was unrelated to the foundation of ►

the church and was exercised by non-apostolic believers (consider Acts 2:1-4,17-18; 19:1-7; 21:9; 1 Cor. 12:7-10, 14:1,26,39; Rom. 12:6, 1 Thess. 5:19-21). Both the nature of the prophetic gift as well as its widespread distribution among Christians indicate that there was far more to this gift than simply the apostles laying the foundation of the church. Therefore, neither the passing of the apostles nor the movement of the church beyond its foundational years has any bearing on the validity of prophecy today.

The fact that today we don't typically see miraculous phenomena equal in quality to what was present in the ministries of Jesus and the Apostles is no argument against the validity of the spiritual gifts described, for example, in 1 Corinthians 12 and Romans 12. If the apostles set the standard by which we judge the validity of all spiritual gifts, we might be forced to conclude that no spiritual gift of any sort is valid today, for who would claim to teach like Paul or evangelize like Peter. No one measures up to the apostles in any respect.

Another common Cessationist argument is that signs, wonders, and miracles were clustered or concentrated at specific times in redemptive history (such as during the Exodus, the ministries of Elijah and Elisha, and in the early church). But this at most demonstrates that supernatural phenomena were more prevalent than at other times, but not that during other seasons they were non-existent or that we shouldn't pray for them today. More important still is the fact that the cluster argument is patently unbiblical and false. Miraculous phenomena occur consistently throughout the OT (see Jer. 32:20). Prophecy in particular was prevalent through most of the OT, being absent or comparatively less active only because of the idolatry of Israel (cf. Ps. 74:9-11; 77:7-14).

## THE PRESENCE OF ALL THE GIFTS IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

A second good reason for being a Continuationist is the consistent and altogether positive presence throughout the NT of all spiritual gifts. Christians in Rome (Rom. 12), Corinth (1 Cor. 12-14), Samaria (Acts 8), Caesarea (Acts 10), Antioch (Acts 13), Ephesus (Acts 19; 1 Tim. 1), Thessalonica (1 Thess. 5), and Galatia (Gal. 3) experienced the miraculous and revelatory gifts. How else could the NT authors have said any more clearly than this what New Covenant Christianity is supposed to look like?

### SUPERNATURAL MANIFESTATIONS AMONG NON-APOSTLES

A third good reason for being a Continuationist is the extensive NT evidence of non-apostolic men and women across the breadth of the Roman Empire consistently experiencing these supernatural manifestations. Others, aside from the apostles, include (1) the 70 who were commissioned in Luke 10:9,19-20; (2) at least 108 people among the 120 who were gathered in the upper room on the day of Pentecost; (3) Stephen (Acts 6-7); (4) Phillip (Acts 8); (5) Ananias (Acts 9); (6) church members in Antioch (Acts 13:1); (7) new converts in Ephesus (Acts 19:6); (8) women at Caesarea (Acts 21:8-9); (9) the unnamed brethren of Galatians 3:5; (10) believers in Rome (Rom. 12:6-8); (11) believers in Corinth (1 Cor. 12:7-10; 14:1ff.); and (12) Christians in Thessalonica (1 Thess. 5:19-20).

### THE PURPOSE OF THE CHARISMATA TO EDIFY

A fourth good reason for being a Continuationist is the explicit purpose of all the charismata: namely, the edification of the body of Christ (1 Cor. 12:7; 14:3,26). Nothing in Scripture leads me to believe we have progressed beyond the ►

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need for edification and therefore beyond the need for the contribution of the charismata. I freely admit that spiritual gifts were essential for the birth of the church, but why would they be any less important or needful for its continued growth and maturation?

### THE CONTINUITY OF THE CHURCH IN ACTS WITH LATER CHURCHES

The fifth good reason for being a Continuationist is the fundamental continuity or spiritually organic relationship between the church in

operation of miraculous gifts as characteristic of the New Covenant age of the Church. As D. A. Carson has said, “the coming of the Spirit is not associated merely with the dawning of the new age but with its presence, not merely with Pentecost but with the entire period from Pentecost to the return of Jesus the Messiah.”<sup>1</sup> The gifts of prophecy and tongues (Acts 2) are not portrayed as merely inaugurating the New Covenant Age but as characterizing it.

### THE OPERATION OF THE GIFTS UNTIL WE ATTAIN MATURITY

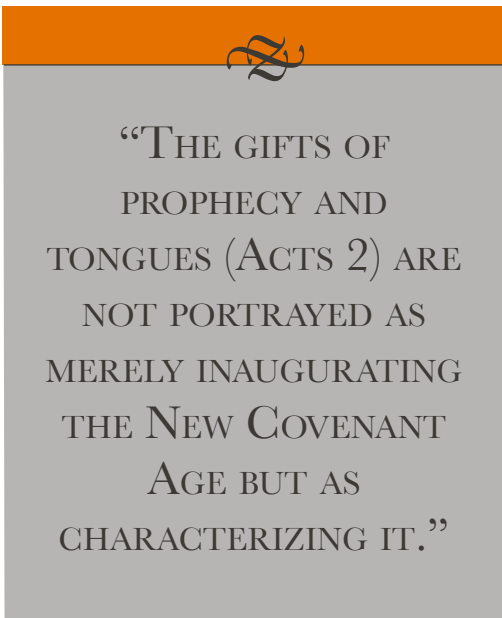
The seventh good reason for being a Continuationist is what Paul says in Ephesians 4:11-13 where he affirms the necessary operation of such gifts “until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ.” Surely, the church will not experience this consummate expression of spirituality until the return of Christ himself.

More could be said and other arguments might be cited, but I hope this brief summation will help us all as we continue to wrestle with this complex and important theme.

*C. Samuel Storms is President of Enjoying God Ministries in Kansas City, Missouri.*

### NOTES

<sup>1</sup> D.A. Carson, *Showing the Spirit: A Theological Exposition of 1 Corinthians 12:14* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1996), 155.



Acts and the church in subsequent centuries. Notwithstanding the existence of a so-called “apostolic age” in the first century, the NT nowhere suggests that certain spiritual gifts were uniquely and exclusively tied to the apostles or that their passing entails the cessation of such gifts. The universal body of Christ that was established and gifted through the ministry of the apostles is the same universal church or body of Christ that exists today. We are, together with Paul and Peter and Silas and Lydia and Priscilla and Luke, members of the same one body of Christ.

### MIRACULOUS GIFTS AS CHARACTERISTIC OF THE NEW COVENANT AGE

A sixth good reason for being a Continuationist is what Peter says in Acts 2 concerning the

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In this brief response, I want to focus on four issues raised by Dr. Waldron. First, Waldron clearly believes that the cessation of apostleship has considerable if not decisive consequences for the cessation of other so-called miraculous spiritual gifts. In fact, he concludes his article by saying that we must consider “the possibility that the cessation of the apostolate means the cessation of the other miraculous gifts.” The tone of his article suggests he actually believes it a “probability” and not a mere possibility.

I fail to see either the logic or the biblical evidence for this conclusion. Conceding the “possibility” of the cessation of any or all miraculous spiritual gifts is something I’m more than happy to do. It’s also “possible” that I’m wrong in my belief concerning the perseverance of the saints and the nature of Christ’s millennial rule and the proper recipients of Christian baptism and any number of other doctrinal beliefs. But for this to be a meaningful argument, I need solid, exegetical evidence demonstrating my error on each of these points. And when it comes to miraculous gifts of the Spirit, that evidence is deafening by its absence.

Aside from the fact that I remain unconvinced by his arguments for the cessation of the apostolic (I await a cogent explanation of Ephesians 4:11-14; see point seven in my article), conceding this point would hardly constitute a decisive triumph for Cessationism or even turn the debate ever so slightly in Waldron’s favor.

How does the cessation of apostleship indicate the cessation of the gift of word of knowledge or word of wisdom as exercised by average, non-apostolic Christians (1 Cor. 12:8)? It doesn’t. How does the cessation of apostleship indicate the cessation of gifts of healings by average, non-apostolic Christians (1 Cor. 12:9). It doesn’t. How does it indicate or even suggest the cessation of the “working of miracles” (1 Cor. 12:10; Gal. 3:5) and “prophecy” (1 Cor. 12:10; Romans 12:6; 1 Thess. 5:19-21) and the distinguishing between spirits (1 Cor. 12:10) and tongues and interpretation (1 Cor. 12:10), all gifts that Paul expected average, non-apostolic Christians to exercise for the common good and edification of the body of Christ? It doesn’t.

Second, Waldron also contends that “biblical prophets were foundational (Eph. 2:20), infallible, and canonical,” on the basis of which he concludes that “prophecy has ceased.” This argument is based on the false assumption that Ephesians 2:20 has in view all expressions of NT prophecy.

But if Waldron is correct, we must then believe that all those who prophesied on the day of Pentecost (old and young, male and female) were contributing to the foundation of the church, speaking forth infallible and canonical truths. We must conclude the same for the prophets in Antioch (Acts 13), the disciples of John (Acts 19), Philip’s four daughters (Acts 21), Christians at Rome (Romans 12), Christians at Corinth (1 Cor. 12-14), Christians at Thessalonica (1 Thess. 5), and Christians at Ephesus (1 Timothy 1:18). Does Waldron want us to believe that all these and no doubt hundreds if not thousands of other believers in the first century were all speaking foundational, infallible, and canonical words from God? If so, why do none of their prophecies appear in the foundational and

*Please continue on page 32*

Let me thank Sam Storms for his thoughtful article. I will respond to the most important of his assertions with which I disagree. Storms connects the result-statement of Ephesians 4:13 directly with the giving-statement of Ephesians 4:11 to argue that the gifts continue to operate. This connection is improbable. “And He gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers...until we all attain to the unity of the faith.” The tenses of the verses do not mesh. The real sense of the text is that Christ gave certain gifts in the past for the attainment of certain goals (v. 12) and the final attainment of those goals is then identified in verse 13. The idea that these verses teach that Christ is going to continue all these gifts until the eschaton is unnecessary.<sup>1</sup>

I agree with Storms that the “perfect” in 1 Corinthians 13:10 refers to the Second Coming of Christ. Nevertheless, his argument is flawed. The contrast between the partial (which passes away when the perfect comes) and the perfect is not a contrast between partial gifts and perfect gifts. It is a contrast between partial knowledge and perfect knowledge. The text asserts that the partial continues until the perfect comes, but this does not imply that the gifts of prophecy and tongues (by which the partial knowledge was given) also continue.<sup>2</sup>

Storms cites D. A. Carson who said, “the coming of the Spirit is not associated merely with the dawning of the new age but with its presence.” We know that OT prophecy often speaks of the coming of Christ as one event though it is separated into two phases in the New Testament. Yet, this does not mean that Christ is present physically every moment of the intervening age. It also identifies the giving of the Spirit with the extraordinary gifts of the Spirit. The major purpose of the giving of the Spirit in the new age is the conversion of the nations. Miracles only serve this cause.

Storms denies that “signs” are marks of an apostle because they were also performed by non-apostles. Granted, it was not just apostles that performed these signs. Still, the text explicitly says that they were “signs of a true apostle.” If the Bible teaches that Christ gave His Apostles power to perform miracles, then performing miracles is necessary to prove oneself an Apostle.

Storms says that no biblical author claims that Scripture has replaced the need for signs. But biblical writers do claim that signs were essential to the authentication of OT prophets and NT Apostles (Deut. 18:21-22; 2 Cor. 12:12). This claim connects such signs with revelation and teaches that miracles were connected with the impartation of revelation.

Storms asks why miraculous signs are not given now if their function is to bear witness to the gospel. Such miracles would, of course, confirm the gospel today—if God gave them! Since many people have been saved then and now without seeing miracles, the idea that miracles are essential is problematic. It is one thing to say that miracles attested the gospel. It is another to say that they are the essential attestations of the gospel. It might be that miracles were “essential” in some sense to the original impartation and establishment of revelation, but not to its ongoing reception.

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infallible canon of Scripture?

Third, Waldron also contends that when tongues are interpreted they are “substantially equivalent to prophecy” and thus, like prophecy, have ceased. But Paul nowhere says this. When tongues are interpreted they function like prophecy insofar as they edify other believers. But nowhere is the gift of tongues based on a revelation as is the case with prophecy (1 Cor. 14:30). Tongues is simply prayer (1 Cor. 14:2,14), praise (1 Cor. 14:15; Acts 2:11; 10:46), and thanksgiving to God (1 Cor. 14:16-17). Furthermore, on Waldron’s view,

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(1 COR. 12:9)?”

uninterpreted, private tongues would not be substantially equivalent to prophecy and would therefore continue today.

Fourth, Waldron argues that all those who “performed miraculous signs” were “apostles or prophets”. But this fails to note that people who were not apostles or prophets clearly performed miracles (see point three in my article). It also fails to note that the spiritual gift of “miracles” in 1 Corinthians 12:10 was given to average individual members in the body of Christ “for the common good,” not simply and far less solely to vindicate their message but to build up and strengthen and encourage other believers.

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Storms says that some cessationists fear that on-going revelatory gifts would undermine the sufficiency of Scripture. I do fear this. Miracles confirmed Prophets and Apostles in their revelatory offices. The form of OT authority is prophetic, just as the form of New Testament authority is apostolic. If there are Prophets and Apostles today, their utterances must have the infallible authority of Prophets and Apostles (Deut. 18:15-21; 1 Cor. 14:37; 2 Cor. 13:3-5).

Storms argues that using the apostles as the standard for judging contemporary gifts

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could lead to the conclusion that no spiritual gifts exist today “for who would claim to teach like Paul or evangelize like Peter.” The spiritual condition and usefulness of the gifted person has nothing to do with whether we have the gifts of the Spirit. The unregenerate can have the gifts of the Spirit (Matt. 7:21-23). The assertion of extraordinary gifts today must be judged by the biblical standard. It is the only one we have! If the “gifts” today do not measure up to this standard, it is because they are not the biblical gifts.

#### NOTES

<sup>1</sup>Samuel E. Waldron, (*Merrick, NY: Calvary Press, 2005*), 61-62.

<sup>2</sup>Samuel E. Waldron, 62-65.





# IN THE NEWS

{ *News items compiled by Keith Gibson & Clete Hux* }

## CONSERVATIVES SEEK TO DELAY SAME-SEX MARRIAGE IN CALIFORNIA

Liberty Counsel, acting on behalf of another conservative organization, the Campaign for California Families, has asked the California Court of Appeal to prevent the issuing of marriage licenses to same-sex couples. The action comes in response to a decision by the California Supreme Court which struck down Proposition 22 which defined marriage as the union of one man and one woman. Proposition 22 was approved by 61 percent of the voters in California in 2000. The court's decision held that homosexual couples had the right to marry.

However, the Liberty Counsel is appealing on the basis that the Supreme Court's decision only addressed two statutes and does not affect the multitude of other statutes on the books governing marriage. Matthew Staver, founder of Liberty Counsel and dean of the Liberty University School of Law stated, "Hundreds of laws apply to marriage, but the Supreme Court addressed only two. It is inconceivable that by striking down two statutes, the myriad of other marriage laws are automatically changed. Since neither the Supreme Court nor the Court of Appeal has declared unconstitutional the myriad of other statutes regarding marriage, local government officials do not have the power to issue marriage licenses until the legislature addresses these statutes." Staver further noted that changes in statutes must be done by the legislature, not the courts.

Additionally, the Liberty Counsel pointed to an amendment to the state constitution which will appear on the November 4 ballot that reads, "Only marriage between a man and a woman is valid or recognized in California." Liberty Counsel is asking for a stay of the most recent decision until the people have had the right to vote on the amendment.

In response to the situation, officials in at least two counties, Butte and Kern, have declared that they will no longer perform marriage ceremonies at all because they claim they do not have the resources to deal with both heterosexual and homosexual marriage requests. County Clerks are required by law to issue marriage licenses but officials are ▶

not required to perform ceremonies. Ann Barnett, clerk for Kern County in Southern California made her decision to stop performing marriages after being informed by lawyers that she could not simply refuse to perform homosexual marriages only.

### **LOUISIANA HOUSE PASSES ACADEMIC FREEDOM BILL**

A bill designed to protect teachers who teach both the strengths and weaknesses of evolutionary theory cleared a major hurdle in Louisiana by receiving overwhelming support in the House of Representatives. The House approved the bill by a 94-3 margin. The Louisiana Science Education Act, as it is officially known, is now on its way to the state Senate where it is expected to receive final passage.

Dr. John West, vice president for public policy and legal affairs for the Discovery Institute noted, "This bill promotes good science education by protecting the academic freedom of science teachers." The Discovery Institute has designed sample legislation for state lawmakers to consider.

According to the bill, the State Board of Elementary and Secondary Education must,

"allow and assist teachers, principals, and other school administrators to create and foster an environment...that promotes critical thinking skills, logical analysis, and open and objective discussion of scientific theories being studied including, but not limited to, evolution, the origins of life, global warming, and human cloning." The bill also allows school districts to permit teachers to use "supplemental textbooks and other instructional materials" to help students to analyze and critique scientific theories. However the bill gives the state board of education the authority to veto those materials.

According to the Discovery Institute, six states have considered academic freedom legislation this year. At least nine states now have state or local policies that protect, encourage, and in a few cases even require teachers to discuss the scientific evidence against Darwinian evolution.

Anticipating the typical attacks from atheistic organizations, Dr. West commented, "Critics who claim the bill promotes religion instead of science either haven't read the bill or are putting up a smokescreen to divert attention from the censorship that has been going on."

### **SCIENTISTS CONSIDER EMBRYO-FREE STEM CELLS**

Scientists in Australia, a country that has long been at the forefront of global bio-tech research, are looking seriously at a new stem-cell research method that avoids the use of human embryos in the quest for cures for degenerative diseases.

This breakthrough method which was announced in both the U.S. and Japan last November reprograms "adult" skin cells into a new kind of cell—an induced pluripotent stem cell (iPS)—that shares the embryonic stem cell's capacity to develop into other types of cells. Further, in the same way that stem cells from cloned embryos share the patient's DNA, so iPS cells genetically match the donor whose skin cells are used to create them. However, iPS cells avoid the ethical issues plaguing embryonic research because they do not require cloning and the destruction of embryos.

For many scientists and ethicists, the discovery of iPS cells completely destroyed the argument that scientists need to use embryos at all in their pursuit of potential therapies for diseases like Parkinson's. The claim that embryonic stem cells were essential to this type of research has long been disputed by pro-life groups who point to the very promising results occurring through the use of stem cells from bone marrow and placenta. However many scientists still felt that embryonic research was necessary because embryonic stem cells were more pluripotent. This argument is no longer valid.

Researchers from the Australian Stem Cell Center (ASCC) in Melbourne recently took delivery of iPS cells from the U.S. and are now testing them. ASCC scientist Andrew Laslett stated that the iPS approach is "a really exciting new area of research" and indicated there was a significant amount of interest worldwide.

## POLYGAMY AND THE FLDS

Both believe they're right. The FLDS (Fundamentalist Latter-Day Saints), with their stance on "physical marriage," and the U.S. government in its stance against polygamy. The two might not have found themselves defending their respective sides were it not for the fact that Warren Jeffs, the "inspired" prophet of the FLDS, prior to his arrest had been on the FBI's 10 Most Wanted List for having sex with a minor and conspiracy to have sex with a minor.

In the aftermath of Jeff's arrest, an investigation into the beliefs and practices of the polygamous group has warranted that the government should do its job, namely, enforce the federal law against polygamy. Part of that enforcement included the state of Texas removing more than 400 children from an FLDS compound in Eldorado, Texas.

Federal authorities have been concerned for sometime over growing polygamous groups, especially the FLDS, in which there have been allegations of child abuse. The recent "Lost Boys" incident has increased awareness of what can happen to children whose lives are strictly controlled in a cult. According to a Deseret News article (Jan. 20, 2007), "Lost Boys" is a group of about 1,000 teenagers who have been cast out or who ran away from the FLDS communities of Hildale, Utah, and Colorado City, Arizona. Some were ousted for committing a "sin" such as kissing a girl, wearing a short-sleeved shirt or going to a movie. Others left rather than adhere to the FLDS Church's rigid restrictions. These rigid rules are set by the prophets in charge who have taken multiple wives and fathered many children – some children not knowing who their fathers are.

Many cases of alleged abuse have led to this present crisis. One particular case which has shed light on the FLDS crisis is found in an Arizona Republic story (May 11, 2008) concerning Carolyn Jessop. Jessop left the FLDS, but told of her experience of having eight children in 15 years. Desperate to keep her 14-year-old daughter from being married off to an older man; she escaped when her youngest son was 1 year old. Part of her reason for leaving was that she was never allowed to forge

a mothering relationship with her children. She said that in the FLDS great emphasis is put on breaking the bonds between a mother and her child. Women were not permitted to show affection to their children because that was seen as conferring value on an individual and only the prophet and the head of the family are allowed to do that.

Jessop has heard people that say they think it is cruel that children have been separated from their mothers by the authorities in the raid on the Texas compound. But Jessop says that attitude is a projection of a belief in an attached and loving relationship between mother and children, which does not exist in the FLDS. Some women manage to forge some kind of connectedness, but many do not. Most children attach to another child for survival and protection like children do in orphanages.

## "CONTROL FREAK" TELEVANGELIST

That's how William Josephson, former head of New York State's Charities Bureau, described Kenneth Copeland to CBS News reporter Laura Strickler in an April 22, 2008 interview. Why such a description of the popular prosperity gospel evangelist who continues to defy a Senate finance investigation? The answer is found in the written bylaws of Kenneth Copeland Ministries.

His church's bylaws (obtained exclusively by CBS News) say Copeland is "empowered to veto any resolution of the Board," thereby concentrating all key decision-making power in the televangelist. These bylaws indicate that the president of the board is Copeland, with his family members also playing critical roles. Gloria, his wife, is vice president. The senior pastor, secretary and treasurer roles are filled by Copeland's son-in-law. Operations vice president and CEO roles are both filled by Copeland's son, John. More documents previously obtained by CBS indicate that, in addition to family members, there are ten other members of the church's board.

Records show Copeland's church spent \$28 million on salaries in 2006. \$13.3 million went to administrative staff. Former employees told CBS News that the Copeland's have about 500 people on staff. Copeland said his ministry ►

takes in about \$100 million a year in revenue, which leaves unanswered the question of what the church does with the remaining cash. Copeland has yet to provide Senate investigators with any of these financial details. He has now launched a website ([www.believersstandunited.com](http://www.believersstandunited.com)) to address concerns about the Grossley investigation and whether churches have constitutional rights that protect them against such investigations.

Josephson labeled Copeland's structure as "very unusual" because control is vested in him and his family to the exclusion of any alternative source of authority. This differs significantly from most churches which invest the greatest authority in the congregation. However, in independent charismatic movements, it is more common to have the pastor as the highest authority in his church.

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# BOOK REVIEWS



## FOUR VIEWS ON THE WARNING PASSAGES IN HEBREWS

Ed. by *Herbert W. Bateman IV* | *Kregel Publications, 2007* | 480 pages

**Reviewed by Phil Carpenter, M.A.**

*Pastor, Lake Charles Bible Church, Lake Charles, LA*

The interpretation of the book of Hebrews has produced a variety of contrastive views and opinions over the years. Evangelicals are yet to arrive at a general consensus of opinion regarding this controversial book. Herbert Bateman IV, a graduate of Dallas Theological Seminary and professor at Moody Bible Institute, brings together four respected scholars who present divergent views on the warning passages in the book of Hebrews. The material was originally presented at the 56th annual meeting of the Evangelical Theological Society in 2004. Two of the contributors are of the Arminian position and two are from the Reformed position. There are obvious differences between these two major camps, but there are also differences between the two Arminian positions and the two Calvinist positions.

Each participant states that he is dealing honestly with the text without being unduly influenced by theological bias, yet it is obvious that theological presuppositions have a major impact on each interpretation. The men present their positions graciously and respond critically to their interlocutors with respect. There is a clear “Christian gentleman” tone to the entire book that is appreciated.

Grant Osborne, Professor of New Testament at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, presents the Classical Arminian view of Hebrews. Gareth Cockerill, Professor of New Testament and Theology at Wesley Biblical Seminary, gives the Wesleyan Arminian view. The Classical Reformed position is provided by Buist Fanning, New Testament professor at Dallas Theological Seminary. Randall Gleason, Professor of Theological Studies at International School of Theology-Asia, presents a Moderate Reformed view. Bateman begins with an introductory orientation, followed by the four presentations. After each presentation there is a critical review

of the position by the other three participants.

In presenting the Classical Arminian view, Osborne proposes that the warnings represent more than a loss of rewards and are not merely hypothetical warnings that cannot be committed (p. 127). While acknowledging that the Classic Reformed view has validity, he rejects it as flawed. His conclusion is that the most likely option is that Hebrews warns of apostasy on the part of the true believer. This apostasy is an “unpardonable sin from which there is no possibility of repentance, but only of eternal judgment” (p. 128).

Fanning, with the Classical Reformed view, believes that even though Christian terms are used to describe the readers, the writer understands that some of them may not be believers (p. 132). He sees Hebrews as making a distinction between “true and false faith” (p. 215). For him the book serves the dual purpose of warning those without faith and reassuring those whose faith is real (p. 216). Those who do not heed the warnings and fall

away demonstrate that they were never true believers (p. 218-219).

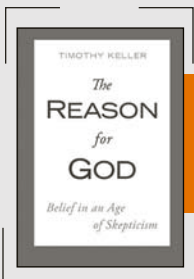
Cockerill sets forth the argument for the Wesleyan Arminian view. According to Osborne, he and Cockerill “almost entirely agree” (p. 293), which causes one to wonder why they are presented as two divergent views in the book. Cockerill proposes that “Hebrews envisions the possibility of an apostasy from which those once in the faith cannot or will not return” (p. 289). He suggests that it is a “fact that Hebrews appears to teach the possibility of a fall from grace with no return” (p. 291). The warnings are given to “urge us to persevere in the faith” (p. 291).

The final view presented in the book is by Gleason, who takes a Moderate Reformed stance. He differs from the Classical Reformed view by seeing the warnings “addressed to genuine Jewish believers” (p. 337). He sees the warnings as written to true believers in and around Jerusalem prior to the destruction of the city by the Romans in A.D. 70. They are urged to continue in the faith and as a part of the Christian assembly, so as to avoid the divine judgment coming upon the Jewish persecutors of the Church. He mentions that the Church

received a warning from God to flee Jerusalem prior to the destruction and that many did so. He spends much time showing how the Old Testament references in Hebrews, pertaining to the Exodus judgment, have a direct and pertinent connection to the believers to whom the book is written.

A conclusion is written by George Guthrie, the Benjamin W. Perry Professor of Bible at Union University. Each of the participants in this project demonstrate quality scholarship. It should be noted, however, that in spite of their exegetical expertise, linguistic abilities, and reasoned arguments, not one of them succeeds in convincing one of the other three participants to change his position!

*Four Views on the Warning Passages in Hebrews* is a good overview of the problems and difficulties facing the student of the Book of Hebrews. Perhaps it could have been improved by combining the two very similar Arminian positions into one. Including a defense of the Hodges/Dillow view, alluded to several times in the book, would have been an added benefit to those wrestling with the correct interpretation of this most important passage in Scripture.



**THE REASON FOR GOD: BELIEF IN AN AGE OF SKEPTICISM**  
*By Timothy J. Keller | Dutton, 2008 | 293 pages*

**Reviewed by Samuel L. Perry, Th.M**  
*Dallas Theological Seminary*

In *The Reason for God*, Timothy Keller, senior pastor of Redeemer Presbyterian Church in New York City, attempts to present a reasonable case for Christianity by answering common objections to the faith and proffering several arguments for its plausibility. To clarify, this is not a philosophical apologetics book. The work is aimed at the type of audience to whom Keller has found himself ministering in NYC: well-educated, but religiously and philosophically laypersons, skeptics who are interested enough to seriously consider the claims of Christianity. Interestingly, although Keller did some of his formal training at Westminster (D.Min. 1981) he does not appear to employ presuppositional apologetics (à la Cornelius Van Til) as one might expect. On the contrary, the reader will find Keller following the argumentation of C. S. Lewis and Alvin Plantinga in virtually every chapter.

Following the introduction, the work is divided into two major sections separated by a brief intermission. In the first section, which Keller calls “The Leap of Doubt” (chapters 1-7), the author deals with the seven most common objections to Christianity he has heard as a pastor in New York City. Following this section, Keller includes an intermission in which he prefaces the second section by explaining to the reader how he will try to persuade them to consider the reasonableness of Christianity. He introduces the reader to a cumulative case approach to apologetics (p. 128). In the second major section, which the author calls “The Reasons for Faith” (chapters 8-14), Keller presents seven major arguments for considering Christianity.

In each of the first seven chapters, Keller attempts to demonstrate to his readers that their objections to Christianity are really just alternate beliefs that require just as much faith as does Christianity. By doing this, he admittedly hopes to shake the reader’s commitment to his or her objections (p. xviii). In chapter 1, the author looks at the argument that “There Just Couldn’t Be One True Religion.” Keller points out how this argument: (1) is itself an arrogant claim to special knowledge since it demands that all who claim to have the true religion must be misled (p. 8), (2) is culturally relative since no one in the Middle East seems to share this objection (pp. 10-11), and (3) requires just as much faith as Christianity since it cannot be proven (pp. 12-13). Keller dismantles the other six objections to Christianity in a very similar manner, usually employing quotes from various philosophers, scholars, novelists, and celebrities.

Space limitations prevent me from expounding Keller’s arguments throughout the book, so I shall simply survey the topics covered in each chapter. In chapter two the author tackles the problem of evil and suffering. In chapter three Keller deals with objections to Christianity’s claim to absolute truth. In the fourth chapter the writer handles the argument that the Church has been (and continues to be) a source of so much injustice and suffering in the world. Chapter five deals with the objection that a loving God could not send people to hell.

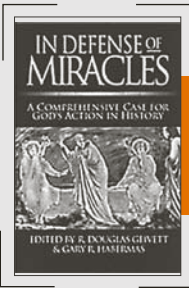
In chapter six Keller confronts the objection that science has largely discredited Christianity. And finally, in the seventh chapter, Keller contends with the argument that one cannot consider the Bible literally true.

In the intermission, Keller explains to the reader that atheistic authors such as Dawkins and Dennett have demanded proofs for the existence of God along the lines of what has been called “strong rationalism,” that is, evidence that is absolutely and universally incontrovertible (p. 118). However, the author explains, their demand for “strong rationalism” has been found to be philosophically indefensible, and Keller consequently pleads for the reader to consider what he calls “critical rationality,” that is, evaluating and affirming which arguments appear to be the strongest rather than demanding proof that absolutely cannot be refuted under any circumstances (pp. 120-121). He then explains that this will be his approach throughout the remainder of the book.

In the seven chapters following the intermission, Keller progressively builds an argument for the reasonableness of Christianity from the ground up. In chapter eight the author argues that nature itself provides humanity with evidence for God’s existence. Keller next presents a moral argument for the existence of God. In chapter ten he builds an argument for God on the problem of sin (which is essentially the moral argument for God’s existence in the negative). In chapter eleven Keller argues for the distinction between Christianity, which is based on grace, and religion, which is based on various forms of self-salvation. The author makes a case for why God’s forgiveness required the ultimate suffering of Jesus on the cross. In chapter twelve Keller discusses the evidence for the resurrection, before arguing in chapter thirteen for the reasonability of the Trinity. Finally, in the epilogue, Keller provides an invitation of sorts to the reader who finds him or herself moved by the evidence.

I feel that Keller argues effectively to his intended audience. As a somewhat educated reader with no formal training in philosophy and only rudimentary training in apologetics, I was able to keep up with Keller’s reasoning and ▶

I found his arguments both clear and compelling. Thus, I have no major criticisms of the book. I enthusiastically recommend this book to lay believers and sincerely interested skeptics seeking insight into the plausibility of Christianity.



**IN DEFENSE OF MIRACLES:**  
**A COMPREHENSIVE CASE FOR GOD'S ACTION IN HISTORY**  
*Ed. by R. Douglas Geivett and Gary Habermas | InterVarsity Press, 1997 | 330 pages*

**Reviewed by Alyssa Lehr**  
*Southeastern Bible College*

The validity of miracles remains a topic of considerable importance and debate for intellectuals and laypeople alike. In their helpful and insightful comprehensive work, Geivett and Habermas have pulled together a notable team of scholars with the overall objective of presenting a positive case for God's action in history by defending the possibility of miracles. Many of the most fundamental questions about miracles are philosophical, and every contributor to this book (minus one) is a professional philosopher.

*In Defense of Miracles* begins with a helpful introduction that sets the stage for the rest of the book by establishing the context of the debate. It begins by tracing the intellectual interest in miracles within theology, philosophy, and throughout history, including a close look at some critical approaches and arguments against miracles. In the remainder of the book, each contributor writes a chapter and brings his or her expertise to a step in the argument to defend miracles. Though each chapter contributes to the book's overall argument, they may be read independently with great benefit.

Part one introduces some of the best arguments against the credibility of miracles. It sets the stage for the rest of the book, which can be seen as a response to the challenges in this section. It begins in chapter one with a reprint of David Hume's essay, "Of Miracles," (originally published in 1748). This essay remains the most influential critique of miracles in history; contemporary critics of miracles continue to use Hume's arguments. Chapter two is written by one of the strongest contemporary critics of miracles, British philosopher Antony Flew, who contributed a new statement of his objections against miracles specifically for this book. Flew builds upon Hume's work, but is not afraid to

critique him where he thinks Hume is mistaken. Both of these essays are very challenging and thought provoking, and an important aspect of the book. The inclusion of these arguments helps the reader to really understand what the rest of the contributors are up against.

The remainder of the book systematically develops a positive argument for miracles. The chapters in part two discuss conceptual issues about miracles and interact directly with the arguments of Hume and Flew. Richard Purtill writes a very thorough chapter on how to define a miracle. He argues against a previous definition given by Hume, and shows how it is question-begging. Norman Geisler's essay critiques Hume and Flew's arguments in more detail. Francis Beckwith considers whether miracles can be recognized in history, and Winfried Corduan tackles the difficult subject of trying to identify a miracle.

The argument develops further in part three with Ronald Nash's discussion about the relevance of worldviews in evaluating miracle claims. Of particular interest in his chapter is his demonstration that a naturalistic worldview (one that excludes miracles) is incoherent and is therefore not a sound basis for rejecting the possibility of miracles. Next, J.P. Moreland ►



writes a thought-provoking chapter, arguing that science does not rule out the possibility of miracles. In chapter nine, David Beck offers direct arguments for the existence of God related to His action in history. Stephen Davis develops a case for the possibility of an immaterial and timeless divine person acting within spatiotemporal human history. In chapter eleven, Geivett moves the argument forward and focuses on questions about the evidential value of miracles. He argues that it is reasonable to expect miracles to offer confirmation to claims of special revelation within a theistic worldview.

Part four narrows down the argument and considers evidence for the occurrence of specific miracles within Christianity. David Clark begins this part by exploring the relationship between the concept of a miracle and various religions. He argues that many religions do not have adequate conceptual space for a miracle and that Christianity has superior evidence for its miracle claims compared to other religions, especially in the case of the Resurrection of Jesus. In chapter thirteen, Robert Newman examines fulfilled prophecy as a miracle, and John Feinberg argues for the coherence of

the Incarnation of Jesus Christ. William Lane Craig provides evidence and six arguments for the historical reliability of the empty tomb tradition and shows how this evidence supports the miracle of resurrection because naturalistic replies fall short. Gary Habermas concludes part four with a strong chapter that provides nine evidences for the historicity of the resurrection appearances.

The editors conclude the book with practical application, considering what it actually means for us to say that belief in miracles is reasonable. The editors hope that it interests the general public to know that there are “scholars today who affirm the credibility of miracles” (p. 277) and that “the case for miracles is strong and needs to become better known outside the academy” (p.280). This book provides the opportunity for those both inside and outside of the academy to understand the case for miracles to a greater extent. This is a very thorough compilation that provides one of the strongest arguments for miracles by some of the best Christian philosophers. This is a must-read for anyone interested in learning more about the issues involved in the current debate about miracles.



### WHY GOOD ARGUMENTS OFTEN FAIL

By James Sire | *InterVarsity Press*, 2006 | 205 pages

**Reviewed by R. Keith Loftin, M.A.**

*Apologetics Resource Center and  
Louisiana State University*

This is not a book of arguments per se; that is, it does not outline several recommended arguments for, say, the existence of God. In it, rather, professor James Sire, author of numerous books, including *The Universe Next Door*, *Scripture Twisting*, and *How To Read Slowly*, insightfully yet accessibly discusses “the pitfalls facing Christians who wish not merely to assert the truth of the Christian faith but to do so with the greatest likelihood of success” (p. 15).

The book is divided into three parts: the first deals with “common logical fallacies,” the second with “good arguments that often fail,” and the final with “good arguments that work.” While its thesis is quite serious, the book is often humorous and witty. For example, the first chapter recounts a story, written by Max Shulman in 1951, in which a number of informal fallacies of logic are wittily introduced. ▶

The book is divided into three parts: the first deals with “common logical fallacies,” the second with “good arguments that often fail,” and the final with “good arguments that work.” While its thesis is quite serious, the book is often humorous and witty. For example, the first chapter recounts a story, written by Max Shulman in 1951, in which a number of informal fallacies of logic are wittily introduced.

The second chapter looks at two such fallacies: unqualified and hasty generalizations. After treating examples of each, it is observed that they are often characteristic of inductive arguments. Because apologists frequently employ inductive argumentation, Sire accordingly urges care.

Similarly, chapters three and four expose fallacious reasoning as seen in both objections to and arguments offered for Christianity. The former begins by addressing causal fallacies, and then moves to distinguish causes from reasons (a distinction, Sire notes, that is generally lost on sociologist and Freudian-type objectors to Christian faith). The chapter ends with a brief look at internally inconsistent and speculative claims. Chapter four rounds out the first section of the book by considering three somewhat more subtle fallacies: those based on sentiment, false analogy, and poisoning the well.

Why are good, rational arguments for Christianity often not just ignored, but rejected (p. 73)? Chapter five opens the second section by addressing one reason: they are not effectively presented. Primarily in view is the apologist’s manner. “Reason alone,” Sire writes, “is not enough.”

Sire begins the sixth chapter by laying out what he believes to be the limits of theistic arguments. While preserving a decidedly backseat role for such projects, he maintains they are largely ineffective due to their highly abstract nature (indeed, his “point is...to understand their limitations and the fact that they do not convince even those well capable of understanding them,” p. 84). Emphasis is placed on the need to know one’s audience as much as possible in order to maximize effectiveness.

Chapters seven and eight discuss worldview commitments as hindrances to the persuasiveness of arguments. The former begins with what is

essentially a review of Sire’s explanation of the concept of worldviews (as seen previously in *Naming the Elephant* and *The Universe Next Door*, 4th ed.; both 2004), before assessing the current debate between the Christian and evolutionary-naturalist worldviews. He recommends we non-specialists “let the whole issue of evolution remain unaddressed...except when it arises as a question” (p. 105). Chapter eight addresses the pervasive principle of relativism, focusing on the related situation of religious pluralism. Examples of the latter are considered, and three options for responding are evaluated.

Chapter nine identifies moral blindness as one of the most prevalent reasons for the failure of good arguments to persuade (p. 117), though Sire warns against immediately assuming this is the explanation for our failure to convince (p. 120).

The book’s final section opens with a “look at two examples of effective public presentations of the gospel” (p. 128). In chapter ten Paul’s witness to the Athenians is closely examined. Sire draws from the text numerous incisive suggestions for a modern witness. In chapter eleven Sire recounts one of his frequently given presentations, which answers the question, “Why should anyone believe anything at all?” The lecture’s short accompanying bibliography is also included. Chapter twelve closes the book with a fine annotated bibliography to guide further study in numerous areas of apologetics.

In short, *Why Good Arguments Often Fail* is characteristic of the insightful, readable style we’ve come to expect from James Sire. Written from years of experience and full of wisdom, this will be a valuable read for all apologists, especially those new to the field.

“AREOPAGUS” MEANS “MARS’ HILL” AND IS TAKEN FROM ACTS 17:19F. (NIV)  
WHERE PAUL ENGAGED IN APOLOGETICS WITH THE GREEK PHILOSOPHERS.

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