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The Nature and Purpose of Our Savior's Miracles

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THE NATURE AND PURPOSE
OF OUR SAVIOR'S MIRACLES.

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The Faculty of Concordia Seminary
Department of Biblical Theology

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by

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"Unto us a Child is born, unto us a Son is given; and the government shall be upon His shoulder; and His name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace" (Is. 9,6). These joyous words of the prophet Isaiah are read every Christmas morning. They strike the key-note for one of the happiest festivals of the Church year. When these words were penned, the children of Israel, the Chosen race of God, were under the heel of the Assyrians. To revive their sinking hopes, to restore their confidence of their ultimate destiny, Isaiah sang of the coming God-anointed King, the Messiah.

But as the centuries continued their journey into eternity, the clouds of captivity and suffering and shame seemed to grow darker and more foreboding for the children of Israel. They needed the assurances of God that they finally would be received in glory. They saw their country laid waste by the invader; their entire people was carried off into captivity; they lost their cherished independence to an alien race. But regardless of the afflictions, stripes, and ills, the teachers of Israel never permitted the faith to fail. The story of the Promised One was passed from one generation to the next. With eyes shining at the prospect of a restoration of all the glory, independence, and power of the days of Solomon, they waited.

"When the fulness of time was come", Jesus Christ, this promised Deliverer, was born into a nation filled with such expectancy. But their hopes were jolted. He did not restore the lost glory of Solomon; He did not free the people from the oppressive yoke of a foreign ruler; rather, as a chief criminal, He died upon a shameful cross. Yet His closest friends and disciples immediately proclaimed Him to be the Messiah for Whom they were looking and praying. Although there were many who disbelieved Him and persecuted His followers, the Gospel of the new dispensation quickly spread to the four corners of the world - accepted and believed by many.

Yet Jesus Christ, although many years have passed since He has withdrawn His visible presence from the eyes of man, is one of the most controversial figures in this our era of human-kind. Ridicule, mockery, and blasphemy have been flung at Him; His every claim is questioned, criticized, derided, tossed hither and thither with the wildest abandon; His miracles are denied or explained away; His teaching ridiculed and rejected; His Cross, Passion, and Resurrection denounced as cunningly-devised fables artfully palmed off on an extremely gullible world. Fickle and false, also, are many of His so-called friends. There have been many generations of Judases to betray Him, of disciples to forsake Him, of Peters

to deny Him. Yet, in spite of these attacks upon His Person and Work, He, the Son of the living God, still stands - stands victorious and eternally triumphant.

A credential demanded of any religion is the miraculous. If Christianity was to be accepted as divine it had to have miracles. And we maintain that our holy religion is not lacking in that respect. No man who reads the Bible with a candid and impartial mind can be of another opinion. It has been correctly stated, that "a non-miraculous Christianity is as much a contradiction in terms as a quadrangular circle; when you have taken away the supernatural what is left behind is not Christianity".¹ But the miracles of Jesus Christ, the Head and Center of the Christian religion, have been regarded by many scholars as the Achilles' heel of Christianity. They are placed in the position of a defendant before the bar of scientific law. And if they are disproved, "Christianity is stripped of its essential peculiarity...the Christian system of doctrine is reduced to a mere product of the human mind, having no divine sanction, and mixed, we know not how largely, with error".² It is understandable, then, why so many and so varied attacks have been made upon the miracles of our Lord.

If we wish to know someone, we must study both his words and his actions. Since we cannot read his mind, we can only analyze what we can see and hear in order to learn who and

¹ R. C. Trench, Notes on the Miracles of our Lord, p. ix.

² George P. Fischer, Essays on the Supernatural Origin of Christianity, pp. 12-13.

what he is. From this it becomes evident, that the Person of Christ, Who and What He is, is involved in the question of miracles and their authenticity. They were, as St. John tells us, recorded to prove that Jesus "is the Christ, the Son of God". (Jn. 20, 31). If they are false, so also is Christ. He then becomes nothing more than an imposter. In short, the objections which seek to annihilate the miracles, also seek to annihilate Christ Himself. If these objections are ever proved to be true, then all the peoples of Christendom have been placing their hope and confidence on nothing more than a will-o-the-wisp, have been building the fortress of their soul on sinking sand. Indeed, then life itself, for them, would lose all meaning and purpose.

In the various epochs of Biblical history, we note that the performance of miracles seems to travel in plateaus. At certain times we have an abundance of them; at others, practically none. To explain the reason for this, Professor Christlieb says:

Miracles, like revelation in general, belong to those crises in which the kingdom of God is to make an important advance. They are connected with certain periods and persons, namely, with the chief promoters of God's kingdom. The time of the foundation and re-establishment of the law of Moses and Elijah; the time of the founding and first promulgation of the Gospel by Christ and His Apostles, were decisive epochs of this kind. In the intermediate ages miracles fell into the background.³

³ Quoted by M. R. Vincent's Modern Miracles, The Presbyterian Review, Vol. IV., p. 478.

Before we proceed any farther, it might be well for us to state what we understand by the nature and purpose of Christ's miracles. By the nature of the miracle, we mean, first of all, what kind it was. What were some of its distinguishing features? For example, a large number of His miracles were those of healing, in contra-distinction to those which He performed on the forces of nature, or those by which He restored the dead to life. In that large classification, however, we find that several miracles had to do with ordinary diseases of the body, while others had to do with the mental and psychical make-up of the person on whom the miracle was performed. Thus the difference between the various miracles is found in the object on which they were performed and not in Christ Himself. Secondly, we shall approach the nature of the miracle from the angle of Christ. We shall note what the accounts say about the manner in which our Savior acted. We find that He always works with the greatest care, sometimes healing by a touch, sometimes by a word, sometimes by His will at a distance, but always in His own name. The words of our Lord are then to be noted. They show how He prepared the minds of the recipients; how He trained His disciples; and how He conveyed the spiritual truth taught from the miracle to the people. Finally, we should observe the effects on the object, on the disciples and people, and especially on

anyone named in the accounts. It will be seen that His work was immediate, indisputable and thorough, always going to the root of the matter, and not simply dealing with a few special symptoms like the so-called healings of today.

We shall also treat the purpose of the miracles from two sides. First of all, we shall note the purpose of the miracles as a whole, as a unit. Yet, each miracle had a definite function which is altogether different from the prime purpose. For example, in the raising of Lazarus, His immediate purpose in bringing His friend back to life was to perform an act suggested by sympathy for Mary and Martha. At the same time, this miracle proved that He was the Resurrection and the Life, the very Son of God.

In any discussion of miracles, the debate usually begins with the question: Does the Bible record what actually happened? Objectors immediately state that the mere mention of the miraculous in the Gospel history brands the letter as legendary and lifts it out of the category of writings possessing trustworthiness. The defenders, on the other hand, contend that miracles are not contrary to any laws of nature, that they are in harmony with the essence of God; hence, the accounts of them may well be true, and since they are found in the Bible, they must be true. Before we proceed any further, it must be quite evident that time

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will not permit a discussion of all the questions and ideas which arise from a study of the miracles. Therefore, we must be allowed to assume that the Bible is the inspired Word of God, that every word in it is the pure truth. Hence, we believe the miracles of our Savior are real, and were actually performed by Him in the way the Evangelists record them. There are, however, certain basic objections to miracles which we will take up for the sake of completeness.

When all is said and done, the importance and purpose of the miracles of our Lord for the individual will depend on his faith. Total acceptance of them should be found with us, because Christ performed them and because they reveal His will, and only this can give meaning to them. To the unbeliever they will be a stumbling-block. At best, they will be a means of satisfying his curiosity. But the believer will find in them food for his soul which is clinging to Christ.

It is our prayer, then, that as a result of this brief work, Christ may become more firmly imbedded in our life, that we may realize all the more His eternal preciousness for us, that we may understand the more that He is the Promised Messiah, the Son of the living God.

Chapter One.
The Essence and Historicity
of the Miracles of Christ.

What makes a certain deed a miracle? If there are any rules for determining this, what are they? Very often the name of a given object indicates some of its distinctive features and characteristics. Let us endeavor, then, first of all, as a matter on which our whole discussion depends, to ascertain what is understood by a miracle, or what a miracle is.

The names used to designate miracles in the New Testament bring out some of their essential properties. They are called by three Greek words in Hebrews 2,4: semeia, terata, kai dunameis, which can be translated by "signs, wonders, and powers". St. John often gives them the name erga, works. "Sign" implies that they were wrought as "a means of revelation".⁴ It is a token and indication that God is very near, that His gracious working is now visible to the mortal eye. Moreover, they are pledges and signs of something to come, which is more valuable and worth-while than the act itself, because they point to the grace and power of the Worker, and at the same time show His relation to the Higher. They declare that He had the power of God with Him and in Him. "Wonder" refers to the effect of the miracle on the minds of the eye-witnesses. They had various reactions: some were filled with awe and reverence, others with hatred and hosti-

⁴ W. E. Orchard, Foundations of Faith, p.179.

lity. All, however, were amazed and astonished at the event. "Powers" indicates that the miracle was not due to natural means within the abilities of man, but far beyond them. The cause of the divine work easily transfers its name to the effect - the power to work such a thing is in the divine Messenger. Finally, they are also called "works", as though the wonderful is only natural for Him who possesses all the fulness of the Godhead bodily. Because He is so much higher and greater than man with respect to both His Being and existence, He must bring forth these works which are greater than man's. And, when one takes into account who He is, it is not startling to find that He did perform these works. The only startling thing would be, if He had not.⁵

Thus a miracle may be defined as an extraordinary, supernatural event which attracts attention and at the same time has a profound effect on the beholders. Although it is due to a high, divine cause and energy, it is never a mere display of power which fulfils no moral end; it is never a disturbance or upsetting of the natural order of things, bringing no special benefit or result with it. It is a sign completing, yes, performed for, some preconceived purpose and end. Miracles are signs which "point beyond themselves to the cause of which they are the effect, to the person of

⁵ R. C. Trench, Op. cit., pp.2-7, *passim*.

whom they are the acts, to the unseen events of which they are the symbols, to the future events of which they are the prophetic preludes".⁶ Yes, they are signs of "grace, illustrations of redeeming power, tokens of the kingdom manifested in the midst of the world, that men entering into it might find deliverance".⁷

In the healing of the paralytic (Mk. 2, 1-12), for example, we can readily see that these names are all different aspects of the same work. Wonder - "They were all amazed". Power - at Christ's command, the man "arose, took up his bed, went forth". Sign - there was One among them who was greater than they, One who "hath power on earth to forgive sins". Works - the simplest word of all, stating that "God was in Christ", and these works were just the natural consequence of the divine fulness.

Now, what were these works of Christ that are called wonders, powers, and signs? They were such as these: the stilling of a tempest by a single spoken word; the healing of sickness by a touch; the raising of the dead by a command; the feeding of thousands with a few loaves and a few fishes; the walking on water without any material support - and the like. These miracles of Christ have defied the attempts of human power to reproduce them; they cannot be explained

⁶ Theodor Zahn, Introduction to the New Testament, p. 504.

⁷ Brownlow Maitland, Steps to Faith, p. 74.

or accounted for by the so-called laws of nature; they cannot be imitated even by the greatest of magicians. With the conviction of these truths and mindful of the words of Peter, "Which God did by Him in the midst of you", we have the basic facts for a definition. So we understand that a miracle is an event which does not follow the usual pattern of secondary causes and effects; which cannot be explained by the ordinary operations of these same causes; and which is performed by someone with the permission and power of God to prove he is God's representative and that his message is true.⁸ However, the operation of that miracle or its performance "transcends the laws of nature and morality, i.e., does not conform to them. It does not involve the suspension or violation of these laws, but only their subordination to the purpose of grace".⁹ A miracle, however, is not an unhistorical event as such; that is to say, not something which lies hidden within the historical fact and which must be apprehended by faith, otherwise there is no miracle.¹⁰ Rather, a miracle is some supernatural event, which is perceptible by the senses, of a believer or an unbeliever. Though it may not be understood, yet it is a fact which cannot be denied.¹¹

⁸ W. M. Taylor, The Miracles of our Savior, pp.4-5.

⁹ William Dewar, What is a Miracle?, appearing in the American Journal of Theology, Vol.8., p.244.

¹⁰ F. W. Camfield, Revelation and the Holy Spirit, pp.158-9.

¹¹ Louis Jouin, Evidences of Religion, p.58.

Compiling a number of definitions of a miracle, Trench has this to say:

Whether we are content to say with Kant, 'Miracles are events in the world with the laws of whose workings we are, and always must be, unacquainted'; or with M'Cosh, 'A work wrought by a Divine power for a Divine purpose by means beyond the reach of man'; or with Coleridge, 'An effect presented to the senses without any adequate antecedent, ejusdem generis et praeter experientiam'; or with Isaac Taylor, 'A fragmentary instance of the eternal order of an upper world'; or with Bishop Fitzgerald, 'Events contrary to the general experience so far as their mere physical circumstances, visible to us, are concerned'; or with Bishop Butler, 'A miracle, in its very notion, is relative to a course of nature, and implies somewhat different from it, considered as being so'; or with Dean Mansel, 'A use of natural instruments acting after their kind'; or with Provost Jellett, 'The exertion of a force not included among ordinary forces of nature, and therefore in a certain sense different from a course of nature, as including an element not contained therein'; or with St. Augustine, 'What God performs out of the usual course of nature as it is known to us'; or with Amiel, 'A miracle is a perception of the soul, the vision of the Divine behind nature'; or with Max Müller, 'It is the recognition of the Divine reflected in the light of common day'; or with the authors of The Unseen Universe, 'A peculiar action of the invisible upon the visible universe'. When we have exhausted our powers of definition, we come back at last to the simple statement, that a miracle is a new effect introduced by a new cause, and that cause is the will of God. It is 'the immediate consequent of the special exertion of the Divine volition'(Jellett).¹²

The question: "Why are not all the everyday happenings of nature classified as, and called, wonders and miracles", is well taken. To create a new being is as great a marvel as raising a man from the dead. The changing of a seed

¹² R. C. Trench, Op. cit., pp.x-xi.

planted in the ground into bread is as great a wonder as the bread which multiplied from Christ's hand at the two great miracles of supply. The truth is that all these things are wonders. But, it must be remembered, a miracle is not a greater manifestation than these ordinary wonders which pass in review before our eyes day by day, but a different manifestation. In Romans I, the Apostle Paul declares that, "the invisible things of Him are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and God-head". In other words, these events are a continuous and continual revelation to all the world and all its peoples of all time. But in Christ's miracles there is definitely a personal element. When He performed His miracles, a certain, definite group of people at a certain place was primarily effected. Of course, those living today benefit by those miracles only in a secondary way, not as they did, personally and even materially.¹³

Besides that, however, there is the concurrence of the marvelous work with a definite command or act of Christ. We may use the miracles of supply as an example. When Christ took the loaves and fishes, and blessed and broke them, there was enough to feed thousands. We cannot tell just what happened. All we know is that at the act of Christ,

¹³ Wm. J. Irons, The Miracles of Christ, p.3.

the food multiplied immediately. In the gradual process of a seed growing to wheat, and that being changed to flour, and that finally baked into bread, we do not have the same situation. There is no special command of Christ. There is no immediate change. And the change that finally takes place can be accounted for by recognized laws of nature, while the miracles of Christ cannot. "At times a miracle may be identically the same as a natural event; but the attending circumstances are such that it may be called a miracle, e.g., as in the case of Elijah, when rain came in answer to fervent prayer (I Kings 18, 41 ff)".¹⁴

Furthermore, we can make a distinction between providential and absolute wonders, and subjective and objective wonders. As an illustration of this we may use the birth of our Savior. When we examine what the fulness of time really was and implied, we cannot but note the finger of God discernible in the writing and shaping of man's life and history. The unification of the then-known world under the Romans with their excellent code of laws; the linking of the entire empire by a net-work of well-built and well-kept roads; the single language, Greek, spoken and understood by practically everyone; the Pax Romana, during which the spread of the Gospel could be effected with little difficulty - such conditions prevailed at the time of Christ's birth. At no

¹⁴ Wm. Arndt, Bible Difficulties, p. 25.

other time in history were conditions so favorable for the spread and expansion of the Kingdom of God. Now we are completely correct if we call this a miracle. But it is a providential, and not an absolute, miracle. It cannot be called an absolute miracle, because there were certain, definitely known causes which brought about the conditions that existed at that time. Certainly, it would be foolish to attempt to disconnect the two. We can call this world-condition a subjective wonder, a wonder for us, but not an objective wonder, a wonder in and of itself.¹⁵

As already stated, the question of the possibility and probability of miracles can be called the Achilles' heel of Christianity. It is not surprising, then, that so many people have attempted to undermine and overthrow the credibility of the Christian religion by their assaults on miracles. Had they succeeded, they could have continued from there and successfully discredited the entire corpus of Christian doctrines and events until nothing but a dead skeleton remained. Let us consider some of the main objections to the miracles of our Savior.

Is a miracle actually a violation or suspension of natural law? Most generally this question has been answered in the affirmative. However, very much depends on one's conception and definition of the "laws of nature". If a person

¹⁵ R. C. Trench, Op. cit., p.11.

views the laws of nature as something constant or static, as something that will admit of no deviation, as something which is an established course and order of things, which is dependent solely and alone on nature and the physical makeup of any given thing, then, properly speaking, he can say that a miracle is a violation and suspension of the laws of nature. Under this conception, the relationship between a given event and the physical antecedents which it invariably follows is taken as constituting the laws of nature. In the case of the miracle, then, the final event does not follow, but is in conflict with, the given set of physical antecedents. When Christ healed the leper, e.g., the restoration to health resulted from a word uttered by a human voice. Hence the connection usually observed to subsist between the physical antecedent and the final result was broken or dissolved. If the laws of nature are this stated connection, certainly the natural law is superseded and violated.¹⁶

According to our definition, a miracle is an event out of the usual observed sequence of secondary causes and effects, which cannot be explained by the ordinary operations of these causes. If, now, from the operation of precisely the same secondary causes an event entirely opposite to that which is invariably produced by them were to result, that would indeed be a violation of the laws of nature. But a miracle is not

¹⁶ Fisher, Op. cit., pp. 478-9.

such an effect. It is a work which results from the operation and introduction of a new cause. To illustrate this, supposed a boy throws a stone into the air, there is a counteraction to the force of gravity, as far as the stone is concerned. There is, however, no violation of the law of gravitation, but simply another force, exerted by the muscular energy of the boy, came into play and performed its work. The force of gravity never changed but remained as operative as it ever was.¹⁷ Furthermore, "the law of gravitation is not properly stated when it is made to involve the bringing to the earth of a stone in those circumstances under which we observe the stone to rise".¹⁸ How does this apply to the performance of a miracle? The resurrection to life of a man who has died, is not a violation of the laws of nature. True, it is an event which the natural causes connected with the event could not have produced, but, on the contrary, acting by themselves, must have hindered. But this change of event is not due to a violation of the natural law, but due entirely to the introduction and operation of a new, yes, supernatural cause. The normal sequence of events which the physical antecedents, if left to themselves, would have produced, is set aside because of the added antecedent, the exertion of the Divine, supernatural power.¹⁹ To illustrate this further, when God preserved

¹⁷ Taylor, Op. cit., pp. 4-5.

¹⁸ Fisher, Op. cit., p. 480.

¹⁹ ibid. p. 480.

the three men in the fiery furnace, that fire did not lose its ability to consume combustible bodies, or to kill. The fact that some of the keepers of the furnace perished from the intense heat shows this. The fire was simply prevented by God from exercising its power on those young men.

We see, then, that the argument that a miracle is a violation of the laws of nature is fallacious. The proponents of this objection do not take into consideration the introduction of a new cause. If two men are unable to push a car, while with the addition of the strength of a third man, they can, this new situation does not alter the first. Nor can it.

Nor is a miracle a suspension of the laws of nature. Coming back to the example of the boy throwing the stone into the air: even while the stone was ascending into the air, the laws of gravitation remained in operation. When the new cause, the energy which the boy exerted on the stone, was used up, the stone fell to the earth. Furthermore, there was no disturbance of the relationship between the heavenly bodies by the action of the boy. The laws of gravitation were not suspended, but remained operative. The position of each of the heavenly bodies remained proportionately the same. Nor can there be any doubt that the next time Lazarus died, he remained dead. The laws governing death were in effect again

only this time no new cause was added to change the situation.

We readily admit the consistency and necessary truth of these laws of nature. And that same necessary truth, rather than rendering miracles an impossibility, certifies that miracles should and must occur if the supernatural is operating. If the secondary causes by themselves, and the secondary causes plus the introduction of a new, Divine Cause, yielded only the same result, then, indeed, would we be living in an unsystematic and lawless world and universe. The better one knows that two and two make four, the better he knows that two and three do not.

This will perhaps give us a clearer understanding of what the laws of nature are. Too often they are thought of as causing the events to happen; actually, they have never done this. The laws of motion do not make billiard balls move: they only explain the motion after something apart from the ball, a man with a cue, the jarring of the table, or even a supernatural cause, has provided it. They simply state the pattern which every event, if it finally does take place, must follow. "In one sense, the laws of nature cover the whole field of space and time; in another, what they leave out is precisely the whole real universe - the incessant torrent of actual events which make up true history....

That must come from somewhere else. The divine art of miracle is not an art of suspending the pattern to which events conform but feeding new events into that pattern".²⁰

Every miracle has a cause and results. The cause is in the operation of God; the results follow according to natural law. During the time which follows its performance, it is interlocked with nature just like any other event. But its peculiarity is that it does not follow the pattern which nature knew before it was performed. For some people this is the crux of the matter. They understand nature to be the whole of reality, which must never be inconsistent or unrelated. Nature is, however, only a part of reality. If it is only a part of it, there still can be that interlocking, although it may not be that way the Naturalist thought.

C. S. Lewis writes on this point:

The great complex event called Nature, and the new particular event introduced into it by the miracle, are related by their common origin in God, and doubtless, if we knew enough, most intricately related in His purpose and design, so that a Nature which had had a different history, and therefore had been a different Nature, would have been involved by different miracles or by none at all. In that way the miracle and the previous course of Nature are as well interlocked as any other two realities, but you must go back as far as their common Creator to find the interlocking. You will not find it within Nature.... Everything is connected with everything else: but not all things are connected by the short straight roads we expected.²¹

The assaults on miracles go farther than the position that they were and are a violation and suspension of the laws

²⁰ C. S. Lewis, Miracles, pp. 71-73.

²¹ ibid. pp. 73-74.

of nature. To Spinoza, God and nature were one and the same; its laws were His decrees. Everything was determined alike as to being and action by the necessity of Divine nature. God was everything. Everything had its existence in Him. He was the first, last, and only Cause. Now, then, every violation or contradiction or inconsistency of natural law was a contradiction of God Himself. To say that God had superseded or acted against the physical laws was the same as saying that God had acted against Himself, which He would never do. Such a view leads to Monism; and to Monism, miracles are not only impossible, but ridiculously absurd. The view of Pantheism and materialism is essentially the same. Each believes in the one force in the universe; each, accordingly, has to deny the fact of an active or conscious will above, yet within, the material universe. But, since their first premise cannot be proved, the inferences drawn from it are not valid. If nature reveals a reason and will, "it is but logical to conclude that the universe will be governed as reason and will alone can govern - in ways that are voluntary and for ends that are rational. These may imply or manifest the miraculous, but our miraculous is our God's natural - i.e., is the obedience of the Divine will to the ends and purposes of the Divine reason".²² In a miracle, then, we have the order of heaven instead of the order of

²² A. M. Fairbairn, Studies in the Life of Christ, p.155.

earth. There is no conflict between God and Himself but a comprehension of a lower law into a higher.

The Rationalistic approach to the problem of miracles seemed to rise from a desire to deny the essentials of Christianity, but, at the same time, keep Him of Whom the Holy Scriptures speak. The rationalists did not want to be classed as infidels and unbelievers, but neither did they want to adhere to the Bible as the only source and norm of faith and the knowledge of God. It was necessary for them to show, then, that Christ never said that He performed miracles, and that the inspired authors did not record any. They explained that a belief that there actually were miracles came from the people who desired and craved to have them. They were not upset by the fact that the whole divine element of Scripture would disappear, because that is precisely what they wanted. The human, they reasoned, could still be vindicated. The credibility, the honesty of the sacred historians would remain intact. Christ would still be regarded as the highest example of goodness and morality which all should emulate. But He was not God.

This attempt was very bold, although it was entirely hopeless, for it appealed to Scripture to prove its theories. How could it explain away the miraculous? Simply by making

the miracles natural, ordinary events. Thus, Christ did not change water into wine, but just brought in a new supply when the guests had finished the old; He did not multiply the loaves, but the people, observing His generous spirit in that He shared the food that He had, followed His example and so there was enough for all; He did not walk on the water but on the shore-line; He did not call Lazarus back to life, but correctly guessed that he was in a sort of coma and aroused him from it. In such a way Dr. Paulus, who was one of the chief proponents of this "explanation", attempted to harmonize the credibility of the Gospel accounts with the denial of the Deity and the miracles of Christ. This view, however, necessarily did not stand the attacks of language and reason that were thrown against it. Both believer, and surprisingly enough, unbeliever, rejected it so completely that it is not held by any reputable individual or group.²³

A miracle is no contradiction of experience. If it were, we would be justified in asking to whose experience it is a contradiction. To my experience as an individual? or the experience of all men? or the experience of the men who lived and walked with Christ when He lived here on earth? If my experience is meant, then it has no bearing on the case. If it is the experience of men generally, then, of course, a miracle is contrary to that. If it were not, then the miracle would be no miracle, for the very essence of a

²³ Trench, Op. cit., pp.64-65.

miracle is that it is out of the ordinary course of nature known and observed by men. But if the experience of the disciples is meant, then it is a begging of the question. That is the very thing around which a discussion of the subject would revolve. Did they or did they not see and experience the miracles which they said Jesus Christ performed? We, indeed, have a certain experience which is called Nature and the order of Nature. But what the result will be when the supernatural meets it, we cannot know. Our experience here is limited to the results and effects which we observe to happen as a result of certain secondary causes or what is done by our own agency. Beyond that we cannot go. Hence, miracles are not a contradiction of our experience, but only strange to it.²⁴

The world sometimes is thought of as if it were like one of those great and complex sixteenth century clocks, which will do almost everything - almost everything but not quite -, and the mechanism must be fixed and adjusted from time to time. The Creator made a world which generally ran according to a certain set of rules. At times, however, certain contingencies arose which the Creator apparently had not foreseen. He was obliged, therefore, to intervene in order to accomplish His ends. The result: miracles.²⁵

²⁴ Horace Bushnell, Nature and the Supernatural, pp.337-8.

²⁵ W. F. Pierce, Christ and Miracle, in the Anglican Theological Review, Vol.VIII, p.214.

But nature does not exist in and of itself. Nor is it left to go its own way. It does not exist for its own sake. And the purpose of its existence must be ascertained outside the sphere of nature itself. Nature is only an instrument; it is only a part of a greater and more comprehensive system. God, then, may have determined originally that at certain points in history the natural, as we know it, should give way to the supernatural. If there is an end worthy of the intervention of God, then a miracle is not out of harmony with the unchangeable character of Divine rule. This lies in the unity of purpose. The same goal is pursued, but the means of reaching it are different. Now He makes use of the natural, again of the supernatural. There is no disruption of the harmony that is in the Divine government. The natural and the supernatural together form one consistent whole. Hence, a miracle implies no after-thought on the part of God. Miracles, not less than natural events, had their appointed place. They are, in a sense, a departure from the law of nature, but yet they are in perfect harmony with the laws of the universe. The higher law prescribes their performance.²⁶

Another form of unbelief which has been brought forward in an effort to invalidate the miracles of our Savior is the

²⁶ Fisher, Op. cit., pp. 491-3.

so-called Mythical Theory. The leading advocate of that theory is David Strauss. He avails himself of all the objections from Celsus to Paulus, which unbelief has found possible to suggest. Although Strauss purports to construct a life of Christ, it is quite evident that the great question before his mind is the question of the truth or falsehood of the narratives in the New Testament which record the miracles. He begins with the premise that a miracle is never to be believed, and the narrative in which it is found is unhistorical. This, however, is a begging of the question, because that is the one thing that he has to prove. His entire work, therefore, is a petitio principii.

What is a myth? It is, in form, a narrative and the idea from which it springs is not reflectively distinguished from the narrative, but rather is blended with it. Moreover, there is consciousness on the part of those from whom the myth emanates that this product of their imagination is fictitious. With this background, we can briefly state the Mythical Theory of Strauss.

At the time when Jesus was growing to manhood there was a universal expectation of the coming of the Messiah. With an intense study of the Old Testament to direct them, the people had a fairly well-defined conception of what this Promised King was going to be like. He would perform such

miracles as opening the eyes of the blind, healing the sick, and raising the dead. He would be greater than Moses and Elijah and all the other ancient prophets. When Christ then began His public ministry, He attached to Himself certain disciples who shared with Him the new belief that He was the Messiah. He taught with power and authority in Palestine. His fame spread quickly. After about three years, however, He was seized by Pontius Pilate and put to death. His disciples, meanwhile, sad and disappointed because He had not established an earthly realm, imagined that He had risen from the dead. Hence, the cause of Jesus Christ was not weakened, but gradually gained strength. Out of love for their slain and, as they believed, risen Lord, there sprang the mythical tales which we find in the Gospels. Believing that He was the promised Messiah, they attributed to Him the works which that Promised Messiah was to perform. - Having thus stated the main points of the theory of Strauss, let us see why the mythical hypothesis is untenable.

The belief of the Apostles and of Jesus Himself, that He was the Messiah, could not be accounted for on the theory of Strauss, in fact, could not have existed, if the assumptions set forth were true. Strauss employs a sort of syllogism. There was a fixed idea that the Messiah would work miracles; the disciples believed that Jesus was the promised

Messiah; hence, the necessity of attributing miracles to Him. These, we are told, were the conditions which obtained at that time and which gave rise to the myths. But if the expectation existed that the Messiah would perform miracles, how could the disciples believe on Him in the absence of such miracles? How could their faith stand the shock of not seeing their dreams concerning His kingdom realized? It must be evident to every candid reader that Strauss is faced with a dilemma. Either the pervious ideal of the Messiah was not so firmly fixed in the minds of the disciples, in which case the motive for the creation of these myths is lacking; or, being firmly engraved in their minds, their faith in Jesus through His life-time proves that miracles were actually performed.

Strauss says that the source of this Christian mythology was the enthusiasm of the infant church. But when he is called upon to explain, he admits that neither the disciples nor the communities which were under their immediate leadership could have been the authors. Whence, then, did these myths come? Who were their authors? To these basic questions Strauss gives only the briefest answer. He affirms that they originated with the dwellers in secluded places in Galilee, among whom Christ lived for a short time, and with those who had occasionally accompanied Christ. There was, then, a com-

munity of Jewish-Christian disciples, separated from the apostles and the Christian flocks over which they presided. From them in thirty or forty years this extensive and coherent cycle of myths developed. But it must strike the reader as a singular fact that there is no evidence whatever for the existence of such a community in the midst of Palestine. No one seems to know about it, except perhaps Strauss. How, then, could all that have been done without the knowledge of the apostles or other well-informed contemporaries? This whole body of myths could not have been kept secret for a whole generation while the apostles traveled up and down Palestine.²⁷

We readily admit that an incrustation of miracles may easily accumulate around the memory of a certain saintly person. Yet the miracles of our Savior appear to be miracles with a distinct difference. In many of the ordinary chronicles of hagiology, the miraculous is presented in such a way as to glorify the hero or heroine. In neon-light fashion they veritably flash with the greatness of the hero. This is not the case in the accounts of the miracles of Christ. On the contrary, they are presented with no attempt at dramatization. Very often, in fact, they are given in just the barest outline. The fact that the sacred historians did not make a full production number out of Christ's miracles is not conclusive of

²⁷ Fisher, Op. cit., 339-359.

anything, yet it is interesting to note this in passing, for it does have cumulative value.²⁸

Finally, are the Evangelists trustworthy? Did they follow "cunningly-devised fables"? We answer with an emphatic NO. Take the case of Thomas, for example. There was a man who would accept no evidence except that which he himself had experienced, regardless of the testimony of his friends and companions. In the light of the greatest of all miracles, the Resurrection, he had to declare: "My Lord and my God!" Surely, a man like him would not blindly accept the miracles of Christ if they had not actually been performed. Again, if they had been a company of deceivers it might have been expected that at least one of them should turn against the rest and expose the fraud for his own personal safety's sake. Yet that was never done, even though they were martyred for their belief.

If this were only a deception, what possible motive could they have had for promulgating it? After Pentecost they had a clear conception of the nature of the Kingdom of Christ. Their ideas of earthly glory and power had been abandoned. They could only expect persecution, reproach, and a violent death. But, nevertheless, they will continue in their purpose to bear witness to Christ. Surely, this is strange, if the testimony borne to them was false.²⁹

²⁸ E. W. Adams, *Is Belief in Miracles Reasonable?*, The Church Quarterly Review, Vol. CXL. p.80.

²⁹ Taylor, Op. cit., pp.19-20.

Such is the outline of the testimony in behalf of the miracles of our Savior. Dr. Hill, in his Lectures in Divinity, gives this summary:

The history of mankind has not preserved a testimony so complete and satisfactory as that which I have now stated. If, in conformity to the exhibitions which these writings give of their character, you suppose their testimony to be true, then you can give the most natural account of every part of their conduct, of their conversion, their steadfastness, their heroism. But if, notwithstanding every appearance of truth, you suppose their testimony to be false, inexplicable circumstances of glaring absurdity crowd upon you. You must suppose that twelve men of mean birth, of no education, living in that humble station which placed ambitious views out of their reach and far from their thoughts, without any aid from the state, formed the noblest scheme which ever entered into the mind of man, adopted the most daring means of executing that scheme, and conducted it with such address as to conceal the imposture under the semblance of simplicity and virtue. You must suppose that men guilty of blasphemy and falsehood, united in an attempt the best contrived, and which in fact proved the most successful, for making the world virtuous; that they formed this singular enterprise without seeking any advantage to themselves, with an avowed contempt of loss and profit, and with the certain expectation of scorn and persecution; that although conscious of one another's villainy, none of them ever thought of providing for his own security by disclosing the fraud, but that amidst sufferings the most grievous to flesh and blood they persevered in their conspiracy to cheat the world into piety, honesty and benevolence. Truly they who can swallow such suppositions have no title to object to miracles. ³⁰

³⁰ Quoted by Taylor, Op. cit., pp. 21-22.

The General Purpose of our Savior's Miracles.

The reason or purpose behind any given act often determines its value and usefulness. In preparing cases for court, the state's attorney, for example, is always vitally interested in the question of probable motives for the crime. And so the question: What part did the miracle play in our Savior's ministry to save the world? Why is Revelation attended with miracles? What particular end is served by the manifestation of supernatural power in connection with Christianity? is deserving of a full examination.

It has been said that Carnegie, the great financier and philanthropist, donated large sums of money to certain organizations with the stipulation that his name be perpetuated thereby. Hence, the motive for the donations is really selfish and vain. The charge that Christ worked His miracles for a similar reason is sometimes heard. He had great power and delighted in showing it to the people because of the plaudits He received thereby. But if that were true, the miracles of our Lord would lose most, if not all, of their value to Christianity as a whole and to us as individuals. An examination of the miracles, however, shows that that charge is entirely untrue. The opposite is correct. In His miracles, we discover nothing ostentatious, no striving for a worldly repute and fame. On the contrary, many are the times that He maintains silence. Certainly, if He had wanted

glamor and prestige, He never would have given such a command. On one occasion, at least, had He been willing, He could have been made a King. But He fled from the eager multitude. Such is not the action of one thirsty for renown.³¹

Neither, on the other hand, is the charge of Renan true. In his famous Vie de Jesu, he observes: "Many circumstances appear to indicate that Jesus became a thaumaturge tardily and unwillingly. Often He performed miracles only after prayer, with a sort of bad humour, and reproaching those who demanded them of Him with carnality of spirit....One would say, at times, that the role of thaumaturge is disagreeable to Him".³² But if the doing of miracles were disagreeable to Him, He simply could have chosen to stop working them. Or, He need never have revealed to the people His marvelous power. This argument is not conclusive but it has cumulative value when we take into consideration the attitude of our Lord in His working of miracles. When the widow of Nain and her friends passed by on their way to bury her son who had an untimely death, Christ need never have raised him. There was no request that He perform a miracle. Yet, He did. In healing the man at the pool of Bethesda, which He knew would bring on Him the censure of His enemies, He showed a definite willingness to perform the miracle. Nothing in the account

³¹ Charles P. M'Ilvaine, The Evidences of Christianity, p. 222.

³² A. B. Bruce, The Miraculous Element in the Gospels, p. 247.

indicates a different attitude. Furthermore, His performing miracles only after prayer, does not show tardiness but rather His close communion with His Father. Then, when He reproached those who demanded signs from Him, it was because they were not interested in Him and His Kingdom but simply in having their idle curiosities satisfied.

Up to the time that Christ began His public ministry, He was known only in Nazareth, and there as the carpenter's son. To His acquaintances He was no different from any one else; perhaps they noted His great honesty and perfectness of life, but they were not aware that He was someone greater. Moreover, when He began His ministry, it was necessary that there be something which would call attention to Himself, something which would set Him off as an extraordinary Person. And that something was miracles. They did, indeed, draw attention to Himself and bring listeners to the words of Him of Whom it was said: "Never man spake like this man" (Jn. 7, 46). There are many passages in Holy Scripture which tell of His fame spreading far and wide because of these works. And that fame was not limited to the hoi polloi but penetrated even into Herod's court. When Jesus was on trial, Herod himself wanted to see Jesus perform some of those wonders of which he had heard so much. ³³

³³ See: Mt. 4, 24; Mk. 1, 45; Lk. 4, 14. 37; 9, 31; Mt. 14, 1.

Toward the end of His ministry the number of people, who were interested only in His miracles, grew. In John 12, we read how "much people of the Jews" came to Bethany "not for Jesus' sake only, but that they might see Lazarus whom He had raised from the dead". But Christ aimed to have His miracles hidden behind Him, and not Himself hidden behind His miracles. He "despaired" of that fact and rebuked those who did not see beyond the mere wonders which He performed. Thus, one of the purposes which the working of miracles fulfilled was to call attention to Himself.

Moreover, by performing miracles, Jesus showed Himself to the people as a very extraordinary Person. By virtue of His doing the miraculous, they knew that He was different from themselves, that God must dwell in Him; that He was a great Prophet risen up among the people. Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews and a member of the Sanhedrin, showed this when he came to Jesus by night and said: "Rabbi, we know that Thou art a teacher come from God: for no man can do these miracles that Thou doest, except God be with him"(Jn.3,2). Although he did not know that Jesus was in truth the very God incarnate, he did perceive that God must be with Him in a very special way because of the miracles which He performed. The Exclamation of the disciples shows the same effect of miracles upon their minds. "What manner of man is this?"(Mt.8,27), they cried. The question does not imply doubt as to His

person, but rather astonishment at new proof of His power and an attempt to fathom the depths of His character and being. Other examples might be given to show that His miracles set Christ off as an extraordinary person.

This naturally leads us to a discussion of the main purpose of His miracles. What did they prove of Him? What is their relation to His Being and Essence? First of all, the miracles prove the Deity of Christ. Some people, however, deny this. Their argument runs as follows. The miracles of Christ do not differ in kind from those wrought by the prophets of the Old Testament. The prophets also healed the sick and raised the dead. There is nothing in the quality of the works of Christ which authenticates the interpretation that they were proofs of His Deity. If we look at the teaching of the New Testament, they argue, we discover that neither Christ nor His apostles attached this significance to His miraculous works. On the contrary, they are said to have been worked by the Father, or by the Father through Him. They are said to have been effected by a power which, though it is permanently inherent in Him, was yet given Him of God. On some occasions they are preceded by the offering of prayer to the Father. They are declared to be revelations of the power and majesty of the Father. And in keeping with these representations is the fact that Jesus performed no miracles prior to His Baptism and His official entrance

on His public ministry. The deity of Jesus is a truth which rests on His own testimony and that of the apostles, and not upon the fact that He wrought miracles which exceeded human power and ability.³⁴

But the preponderance of evidence makes this position untenable. First of all, He had created the world. He upholds all things by His mighty word, as we are told in the Epistle to the Hebrews. It is not strange, then, or difficult to believe that He had power of Himself to heal the sick and raise the dead. Besides, there are many miracles in the performance of which He did not call upon God or attribute the power to work them to His Father, miracles which He performed by and in His own power. Thus Jesus said: "I say unto you, arise"(Lk.7,14); "I will, be thou clean"(Mt.8,3); "Go, thy son liveth"(Jn.4,50). What is the meaning of that majestic: "I say unto you"? It is language indicative of His deity. He claims to do these things by His own power. And unless Jesus Christ wielded divine authority in a manner in which no mere human representative and messenger of God has ever wielded it, for Him to stand and declare "I say unto you", was pure and simple, outspoken blasphemy. And yet that word had power. He assumed to act by His own power, and the event showed that He did not assume too much.³⁵

³⁴ Fisher, Op. cit., p.497.

³⁵ E. Eckhardt, Homiletisches Reallexikon nebst Index Rerum, Vol.V-Z, p.406.

To illustrate this further. When Christ said to the paralytic: "Son, be of good cheer, thy sins be forgiven thee", His enemies understood His claim aright. Shocked, they murmured: "Who can forgive sins but God only?" They knew by His statement that He was doing that in His own name and power and hence, taking on a prerogative of God. Now observe the proof of His deity by the performance of the miracle. Jesus admits that only God can forgive sins, and the argument which He adduces from the healing of the paralytic may be amplified thus: "It is true that none can forgive sins but God; but it is also true that none can heal this disease of the palsy by a word, but God; if, therefore, I do that latter work here before your eyes, you have a proof that I am entitled to do that other work - the forgiving of sins - which belongs to a department beyond the range of your observation or investigation. The two works, each in its own province, are such as only God can perform, therefore by my performance of the one I give you confirmation of my authority to do the other".³⁶

It is true that there are many statements in the Sacred Record which declare that Christ performed a certain miracle because the Father worked it through Him. It is true that

³⁶ Taylor, Op. cit., pp. 25. 26.

Christ performed some of His miracles only after prayer. "The primary cause of all the New Testament miracles is the divine volition, - dunamis theou or kyriou (Lk.5,17)...Jesus ascribes His own miraculous works to the same source: they are wrought in the name of the Father (Jn.10,25), and originate ek tou patros; they are, in brief, ta erga tou patros, - divine acts of free will. Yet this divine power to work miracles is represented also as having its seat in the personality of Jesus: it is conditioned, however, on His spiritual communion and union with the Father (see Mk.9,29; Mt.14,19; and compare Lk.17,5)".³⁷ But a miracle cannot be considered apart from Him who works it. In the person of Christ dwelt both the human and the divine natures. While He was on earth in His state of humiliation, He did not always make full and complete use of His divine attributes which were communicated to His human nature. When Christ prayed, then, or declared that the Father was working the miracle through Him, it was according to His human nature (Jn.5,36; Jn.11,41-42). But when He performed His miracles in His own name and power, it was according to His divine nature.³⁸

It is interesting and instructive to note how Jesus passes by the word "equal", when the Jews charged Him with setting Himself up as a rival God, "making Himself equal

³⁷ George T. Ladd, The Doctrine of Sacred Scripture, Vol. I., p.304.

³⁸ Reallexikon, Vol. V-Z, p.406.

with God". He does this in order that He may dwell upon His perfect filial unity with His Father. He entirely disavows equality in the sense that the Jews meant it. It was impossible to think of a more complete subordination than that of the Son of God to the Father. St. Paul, therefore, says of Him that He did not deem equality with God a thing to be "grasped at". Consider once more those wonderful sayings of Jesus: "Verily, verily, I say unto you, The Son can do nothing of Himself, but what He seeth the Father do". What language could more plainly repudiate any independent equality of the Son with the Father according to His human nature? But then our Lord adds: "What things soever He doeth, these also doeth the Son likewise." Such a relation might not unnaturally be expressed by the term equality. But, while on earth, He seemed to stress filial unity, eternal sonship as the key to what He was and is at the side of the Father. He did not hesitate to name as the Father's purpose that "all men should honor the Son, even as they honor the Father".³⁹

From this, then, we can conclude that the miracles are a proof of Christ's deity. If any person does something of His own power which lies exclusively in the sphere of the prerogatives of God, that person must be God. If Christ, therefore worked miracles in His own name and power, He must be God.

³⁹ James Hastings, The Great Texts of the Bible, Vol. XII., p. 406.

The title "Christ" is the Greek word which means "Anointed". The Hebrew form of the word is "Messiah", which also means "Anointed". That was the name applied by the Jews to the great King, Priest, and Prophet for whose coming they had waited for centuries. Jesus Christ, then, really means that He was the Messiah spoken of in the Old Testament. Was Jesus really that Christ? That was the question in the mind of the woman of Samaria, when she called her towns-people together and described the man who "told her all things that ever I did: is not this the Christ?" Again, when Jesus was on trial for His life before the council of the Jews, and the false witnesses could not convict Him by their testimony, the high priest put Jesus under oath and said: "I adjure Thee by the living God that Thou tell us whether thou art the Christ, the Son of God". And Jesus answered: "I am." The first disciples followed Jesus because they believed that He was the Christ, the Messiah. The Jews put Him to death because He claimed that He was.⁴⁰

One of the basic conceptions of the Messiah was that He would perform miracles: He would heal the sick and raise the dead. There are many other signs which were the marks of the Messiah, but an examination of them would take us too far afield. The prophet Isaiah names some of the miracles the Messiah should effect, when he writes: "Then the eyes of the

⁴⁰ Cl. Macartney, Twelve Great Questions About Christ, pp. 43-49.

blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf shall be unstopped. Then shall the lame man leap as an hart, and the tongue of the dumb shall sing" (Is.35,5-6).

When John the Baptist was in prison, he heard of the works of Christ. Doubt, however, welled up in his mind. He sent two of his disciples to ask: "Art Thou he that should come, or do we look for another?" (Mt.11,3). In short, was Christ the Messiah? Instead of sending His forerunner a long dissertation, proving that He was the Anointed of God, He told the disciples to "go and shew John again those things which ye do hear and see: The blind receive their sight, and the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, and the poor have the Gospel preached unto them" (Mt.11,5). By appealing to His works which were the same as the predicted marks of the Messiah, Jesus satisfied John's doubts as to His Messiahship.⁴¹ The fact of the matter is that, if Christ had not performed these miracles, He would not have been the Messiah. But He did, and He is.

The Old Testament gives the Messiah certain names which describe His Being and Essence. Some of these are: "Wonderful, Counselor, the mighty God", or "Immanuel", God with us. These names certainly announce that the Promised One was indeed the true God. Since Christ is that Promised Messiah, He is true God. The miracles are, in a way, an indirect proof of that fact.

⁴¹ cf. Ps.107,29 and Mt.18,27.

Yet there is the claim that the miracles of the Old Testament prophets are no different from those which Christ performed. Certainly the miracles of these prophets or those which were performed later by the Apostles do not prove that they are God. Wherein is the difference, then, between the two sets of miracles? The works which were performed by these valiant saints were not wrought in their own name or power. God was working with and in them. Christ, however, performed His miracles, as stated before, in His own name and power. The miracles of the disciples, particularly since they were performed in Christ's name, were nothing else than proofs of the deity of our Savior, Jesus Christ.⁴²

Those who do not believe that the miracles of Christ were performed to prove His deity are faced with much incontrovertible evidence. At the top of the list stands one passage of Scripture which definitely states this fact. That passage is John 20,30-31: "And many other signs truly did Jesus in the presence of His disciples, which are not written in this book: But these are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through His name". Let us examine this more closely.

⁴² E. Eckhardt, Reallexikon, Vol.V-Z, p.407.

These verses set forth the purpose which the author had in mind when writing this book. It is evident that St. John prepared the book on the principle of selection. Many others are not written, but "these are written". These selections were not made in a hap-hazard or slipshod way, but they are intended to verify and set forth some truth or doctrine. These proofs are those which were given in the presence of the disciples. They are dependent, then, in a special way, upon the personal testimony of these same witnesses. The doctrine or fact to be proved is that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God. And the ultimate purpose is that the readers might believe what the author evidently believes.⁴³

The method employed by the Apostle of Love to convince men that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, is very simple. He does not expect men to take him at his word. Accordingly, he reproduces those salient features in the life of Christ which chiefly and plainly point to His Messiahship and Deity. He believed that what convinced him would do the same for others. One by one he cites his witnesses, never concealing adverse testimony, but reported the unbelief of some, yet at the same time showing how faith grew until it expressed itself in the glorious confession of Thomas: "My Lord and my God!" Hence, the Evangelist relates those incidents about

⁴³ Godet, Commentary on the Gospel of St. John, Vol. 2., pp. 536-7.

Jesus which were essential for the world to know. These culminate in the raising of Lazarus in the first part of the Gospel, and continue on to the revelation of Himself as the permanent Source of life and joy for His disciples and the Victor over Death.⁴⁴

The words of the text also add much. We are told that "these are written". How much is included in the "these"? "These" refers to the selection which John made from all the deeds of Jesus. The object has determined the selection of the miracles: "That ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God". In other words, the miracles of Jesus, in which we are primarily interested, have as their purpose to prove to any open mind the Messiahship and Deity of Christ. That is the clear teaching of this passage. Nothing more can be said.

But what testimony do miracles themselves give to the teaching of Him by whom they were performed? On the first great day of Pentecost, Peter declared that God approved Jesus of Nazareth by "miracles, signs, and wonders". The author of the Epistle to the Hebrews declares that the wondrous redemption in Christ was made sure unto them that heard Him, and "God also bearing them witness, both with signs and wonders, and with divers miracles, and gifts of

⁴⁴ W. R. Nicoll, The Expositor's Greek Testament, Vol.1., p.679.

the Holy Ghost". Now from these and similar passages, it becomes evident that the miracles of Christ were proofs of His mission from God and thereby give greater authority and credit to His teaching.⁴⁵ They were the attestations by God of the commission of Him who represented Himself as bringing a Message from God to men. They are the credentials of the legate of the Most High, proving that He by whom they were wrought was clothed with an authority to speak in His name. Their testimony, however, was not directly to the doctrine of the Messenger, but simply to the Messenger Himself. But, through Him, they put the stamp of approval of God on His message that it was the truth. On this point, Taylor writes:

It has been often said, indeed, that power cannot in the nature of things confirm truth. But whether it can or cannot depends entirely upon whose power it is. Now, in this instance, as we have seen, it is the power of God, and the moral perfection of Deity vouches for the truth of the doctrines which He taught, altogether independently of the miracles, just as a man is innocent or guilty, altogether independently of his being proved to be either the one or the other. The effect of evidence is not to make him innocent or guilty, but to make plain which of the two he is. And in like manner the miracles do not make the claims of Jesus or His doctrines true, but they are the attestation of God that His claims are well founded and His teaching divine.⁴⁶

Is this end unimportant? Definitely not! If the Christian religion is important, then it is necessary and

⁴⁵ S. Chandler, A Vindication of the Christian Religion, p. 46.

⁴⁶ Taylor, Op. cit., pp. 23-24.

essential that its authentication be firmly established. Whether the doctrine is of God, or of man; whether the Gospel is just another attempt of man to find peace and happiness before he dies, one more effort of erring reason to find an answer to the questions of life, is of prime importance. Every sane and logical mind wants to know if a thing is reliable; if it will not fail him when he needs it most. The authority and certainty of the Christian doctrines are of inestimable value: and these are guaranteed by the miracles of our Savior.⁴⁷

Meanwhile, the doctrines and the miracles remain two mutually supporting species of evidence. The more the mind is struck with the divine excellence of the doctrine, the more likely does it seem that this doctrine should be attended with miracles. If the doctrine is noble and worthy and sufficient, we naturally look for miracles, and only require that they "shall be recommended to belief by faithful testimony....The excellence of the doctrine sustains the testimony to the miracles; the proof of the miracles establishes the divinity of the doctrine".⁴⁸

In passing, we note the reply of our Redeemer to the charge of His enemies that His miracles were wrought by the power of Satan. He does not deny that works which surpass

⁴⁷ Fisher, Op. cit., pp. 499-500.

⁴⁸ Fisher, Op. cit., p. 505.

the power of men may be effected with the aid of devils; but He answer the charge with a moral consideration. The kingdom of evil would not work against itself and would not use power to destroy itself. So much is clear, then, that a doctrine must be "negatively unobjectionable on the score of morality or of moral tendency, in order to challenge our faith, whatever wonderful works may attend the annunciation".⁴⁹

Furthermore, it is necessary for us to consider the relation of the miracle to personal faith in Christ. The function of the miracle was not to create faith in Christ. If this were the case we would be entitled to expect that where the most miracles had been wrought, most faith would have been produced. But actually it was the reverse - the most miracles, the least faith.⁵⁰ The Evangelist reports that Jesus "then began to upbraid the cities wherein most of His mighty works were done, because they repented not"(Mt.11,20). As far as the creation of faith is concerned, miracles are an inferior aid as compared with the teaching, the word of Christ. These wonders could not create faith outright. They could not kindle spiritual life. Faith at the time of Christ, as in ours, came "by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God"(Rom.10,17). But, even in this relation, they are not without value. Apart from miracles, there was sufficient

⁴⁹ Fisher, Op. cit., p.505.

⁵⁰ Maitland, Op. cit., p.76.

proof of His mission and Person which would have satisfied every open mind. But if this proof did leave the mind still skeptical, Christ pointed to His miracles, as He said: "Believe me that I am in the Father, and the Father in me; or else believe me for the very works' sake" (Jn. 14, 11). Miracles might confirm a weak faith or serve as an aid to it. When there was a definite hostility, however, or entire insensibility to the Gospel, or the absence of any desire for the saving truth, our Lord refused to perform miracles. Miracles, for such minds, would not have any convincing efficacy. In short, miracles become an extraordinary prop which corroborates the doctrine of Christ and at the same time will confirm and strengthen, but never produce, even an inchoate faith.⁵¹

Yet, the New Testament regards the office of the miracle as unfulfilled unless it exerts an influence within the spiritual realm.⁵² Faith in miracles is of little value unless it becomes faith in Christ.⁵³ It is for that reason that miracles call upon those that witness them to repent and give glory to God.⁵⁴ The declaration of real faith, rather than the miracle regarded as a means to elicit the declaration, is the

⁵¹ Fisher, Op. cit., pp. 512-3.

⁵² See esp. Mt. 12, 22-37.

⁵³ Jn. 9, 24-25; 31-4

⁵⁴ Mk. 5, 19-20; 6, 12; Lk. 10, 13.

factor that displays the true dokaa theou.⁵⁵ When Peter made his great confession: "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God"(Mt.16,17), he could not make it because of the evidential value of miracles, though they confirmed that belief, but, as Christ tells us, to the Father's spiritual action on his heart.

Miracles also form a constitutive part of revelation. They reveal not only the power, but also the character and will of God. Thus, they properly may be called "acted parables".⁵⁶ It is correct, then, to regard them as "the forthflowing of that love which, according to prophetic oracles, was the chief Messianic charism. This view may not be applicable to all the Gospel miracles without exception, but it holds true of the healing miracles, which form by far the larger portion of the whole. Of these we may say that they had the same origin as the preaching of the Gospel to the poor - the deep well of love in Christ's heart".⁵⁷ These miracles of healing, for example, symbolized His ability to cure the soul of its ills. The feeding of the multitude graphically demonstrated that with Him nothing is impossible, even though the means at His disposal is apparently insignificant. His resurrection from the dead is the standing symbol, in the Pauline epistles, for the spiritual awakening from the death of sin.

⁵⁵ Ladd, Op. cit., p.306.

⁵⁶ M.L.Young, The Evidential Value of Miracles, p.439.

⁵⁷ Bruce, Op. cit., p.258.

Chapter Three
The Miracles of Healing

Such, then, are the purposes of our Savior's miracles. That they fulfilled their purpose is plainly evident from the fact that in Christendom today, many years after they were wrought, believing hearts still look to them. They have not lost their power or meaning. Many find a confirmation of their faith in Christ in them. Many are persuaded that Jesus Christ, in truth, is the Son of God because He performed them. Many find comfort and consolation because, as He healed the sick in His day, so He will in ours, comforted because they know that God loves His people. Many scoffers and skeptics are silenced because the wonders of our Lord give undying proof that His Word is truth. Yes, the miracles of Christ served their purpose well.

Chapter Three.
The Miracles of Healing.

It is a standing joke among doctors that one of the best panaceas is the ordinary sugar pill. Many are the people who stream into their physician's office and complain of serious illnesses. The doctor, realizing that actually there is nothing wrong with them, gives the patients some "potent medicine", which, they are cautioned, should be taken only as directed. The patients do so and come back to sing the praises of the doctor who is so wonderful. Yes, the sugar pill can cure.

The charge that our Savior wrought His miracles of healing in much the same way is often advanced. Men are willing to admit that many of them happened, but are inclined to deny the miraculous element in them. The symptoms of many diseases can be aped by hysteria, and hysteria can be driven away by suggestion. In a recent lecture on psychosomatics, Dr. Slaughter explained that many ills beset a person not so much because of a bodily disorder, but from an unfavorable condition of the mind. The power of the mind over the body is recognized today, and many a practitioner is healing diseases without the aid of drugs. Such was the power, so Christ's enemies claim, that Jesus brought to bear upon the bodies as well as the souls of men, that it gave health and life to those who were diseased. Hence, the miracles of healing which our Lord performed are said to be no different from

those which doctors effect today. The name which modern science has applied to such cures is psychotherapy.

It is true, on the one hand, that the words used by the sacred writers to describe the miracles of healing do not of themselves assert the miraculous nature of the cure.⁵⁸ Nor need they. The miracle does not lie in the fact alone that they were cured, but rather in the manner that the cure was effected. Perhaps many of those illnesses which our Savior cured could have been removed by a doctor today over a period of time. But then we should not be dealing with miracles. The fact that the cure was effected at the word of Jesus and at that given moment - therein lies the miraculous.

In this and the subsequent chapters, we shall examine some of the miracles of our Lord as to their nature and immediate purpose. In our examination we shall follow the method used by Archbishop Trench. The first miracle under consideration is the healing of the woman with an issue of blood.

The scene of this event was a street in the city of Capernaum. Jairus, a ruler of the synagogue, had come to Jesus beseeching His aid for his little daughter, lying at the point of death. When Jesus started toward the ruler's home, the crowd, which was with Him, followed. With the crowd there mingled, unnoticed, this woman. She was suffering

⁵⁸ Such words are: Therapeuein; sozein; hiasthai.

from a distressing malady, which physicians today would probably term menorrhagia, and it had been chronic for a period of twelve years.

The Levitical law made the status of such a sufferer extremely painful. She was unclean and impure, ceremonially. She was cut off from all religious associations and was forbidden, under penalty, to come into contact with her countrymen. Mark tells us how desperately she sought a cure: she "had suffered many things of many physicians, and had spent all that she had, and was nothing bettered, but rather grew worse" (Mk. 5, 26). It is interesting to note in passing, how Luke, the doctor, describes this condition. He says, "she was not strong enough to be healed by anyone" (Lk. 8, 43), which implies that it was the patient's inability to rally, not the doctor's inability to cure, that was at fault.⁵⁹

The woman, at this time, was probably mistaken about the cures of Jesus. No doubt she had heard of Him and His miraculous power over disease. Possibly and probably she thought that He healed, not so much by the power of His will, but rather by a certain magical influence which was diffused around Him. She therefore thought that if she touched His garment she could obtain a cure without having to face and be embarrassed by the multitude. Yet her confidence was unbounded. She was sure if she could but touch His garment, she would be healed.

⁵⁹ Shafto, Op. cit., p. 117.

And she was not mistaken. No sooner had she touched Him than she felt that she was whole. But why did Jesus pause, since the woman was already whole? Why did He not allow the timid woman to shrink back into obscurity? Why expose her to the curious glances of the people? It must have taken much courage on her part to come before all those people and tell why she had touched the Lord. Yet Christ could not dismiss her until her cleansing was complete, until she knew just how that healing had been wrought. She must not go away with her body healed and her spirit not. He must establish the personal relationship. She must know who He was. So He asked the question: "Who touched Me?" Not, as the disciples thought, because He did not know, but simply to draw the woman into the open, for He plainly states: "For I perceive that virtue is gone out of Me". The woman, realizing then, that concealment was impossible, came forth trembling and declared all.⁶⁰

Christ's last word to her was one of tenderness and compassion. He calls her "Daughter" - the only woman whom He addressed by that name. He tells her that it was her faith, not her finger nor His garment, which had been the medium through which the healing power had reached her. He taught her the lesson that faith is the hand which will and does receive all the blessings of God. He confirms the blessing with the words: "Be whole of thy plague!" And she goes, "having

⁶⁰ R. Calkins, How Jesus Dealt with Men, p.105.

found more than she sought, she felt a loving heart where she had only seen a magic-working robe".⁶¹

The purpose of Christ in effecting this miracle lay not so much in just curing her, though this was important, but in teaching the woman and the witnesses of the deed the value and importance of faith. He showed that faith cannot be faith in something, and be a saving faith, but must be a faith in Himself. By properly guiding her faith to Himself, she could "go in peace," in full possession of health, both of body and soul.

No doubt Jesus had Jairus in mind when He healed the woman. His faith would need to be strengthened because of the ordeal he soon would face. Hence, by showing His authority over another disease, the Lord prepared this ruler's heart for the news that his daughter had died, and gave it needed strength to continue to rely on Christ.

The third miracle which is recorded in John's Gospel, the healing at the pool of Bethesda, (John 5), finds its place there for apparently two reasons. First of all, it marks the beginning of the angry resentment and bitter hatred directed against this great Teacher, Who rebuked the hypocrisy and shallowness of the Pharisaic law, as explained by the Jewish rulers. Secondly, it is the occasion for that great

⁶¹ A. Maclaren, Expositions of Holy Scripture, St. Luke, p. 245.

utterance of our Lord about His Sonship and His divine working as the Father also works, which occupies the remainder of the chapter and lays the foundation of much which follows in the account of John. It is for these reasons, and not just to relate another miracle, that John records the miracle at the pool of Bethesda.⁶²

If these, then, are the reasons for introducing the miracle, it is not necessary to dwell, except very lightly, on some of the preliminary details which preceded the actual cure. It does not matter too much, in the purpose of our discussion of this miracle, whether the Feast on which our Lord went up to Jerusalem was the Passover or the Purim,⁶³ nor whether the pool was by the sheepmarket or by the sheepgate, nor the exact location of the pool in the city of Jerusalem. It may be of importance for us to notice, though, that the mention of the angel in the fourth verse is not a part of the original narrative. The most important Greek and Latin copies together with most of the early Versions omit that fourth verse. In the other MSS. which retain this verse, the obelus which hints suspicion, or the asterisk which marks rejection, is attached to it. This probably was a marginal note at first, which expressed the popular belief of the Jewish Christians as to the cause of the healing power in the

⁶² Maclaren, Op. cit., St. John, p. 235.

⁶³ Such authorities as Taylor and Trench hold the view that the Feast was that of the Passover.

water. By degrees, then, it assumed the shape in which it now appears.⁶⁴

Because of the kindness of some forgotten benefactor, there were five porches built around the pool. In them lay wasted forms, pale, emaciated faces bearing the marks of all sorts of pain and agony. The enumeration by four, "sick, blind, halt, withered", is meant to be exhaustive. It requires no gift of imagination to understand how the heart of Jesus must have been wrung by sorrow and deep pathos at sight of it all. His eyes roamed over the whole crowd until it singled out this one, most hopeless case. To this poor man, sick and impotent for thirty-eight years, many of which he had spent dragging his beaten frame to the pool's edge only to have someone else step in before him, Jesus addressed Himself. "Jesus always distinguishes the individual from the mass. He detached one man, one woman from the multitude and let the full power of His personality fall upon him. It was Jesus' way of dealing with men - not in the aggregate but in the concrete".⁶⁵

Upon first reading, the question of Jesus: "Wilt thou be made whole?" seems to be superfluous. After all, which of the people at the pool did not desire that very thing? Was that not the reason for their being there in the first place?

⁶⁴ Trench, Op. cit., pp. 206-207.

⁶⁵ Calkins, Op. cit., p. 109.

Yet there is a purpose for that question. The man, lying there all those years and waiting in vain for a cure, had probably lost all hope. Thus, Christ, by that question, would re-kindle hope in his heart, and also awaken in him the faith that this Jesus, who showed such kindly interest in Him, also had the power to bring him the healing for which he had waited so long.

The man's answer: "Sir, I have no man, when the water is troubled, to put me into the pool", contains no direct reply, but only an explanation of why he had not been cured. In those words we find the cruelty of that scene. It was not a scene of absolute inhumanity, however; for there was also much that was beautiful about it. There was much love and helpfulness shown there. People were there who were interested in bringing help and relief to loved ones. Yet this man was alone. Thereupon, Christ said: "Take up thy bed and walk!" The taking up of the bed was to serve as a witness to the completeness of his cure. The man showed his faith in the power and word of Jesus by the very act of rising and walking. He attempted the act and found that he now had the power. And the day was the Sabbath. This is significant, for it is responsible for all which follows - the hatred of the Jews for Christ and their attempt to kill Him.

The Pharisees who saw the man walk with his bed, had little interest in the miracle, which set forth Christ as the great Healer. The only circumstance that aroused excitement and hate was the fact that he was not obeying their rigid laws and precepts concerning the Sabbath. Hence, paying no attention to the fact that it was the paralysed man who was doing this, they, in their narrow way, attacked him on the ground that he was breaking the Rabbinical restriction. The man, however, gave them an answer which perhaps went deeper than he himself realized. He said in effect: "Certainly, He who gave me the power to arise, has the right to tell me what to do". Yes, it may be said: "The only Person that has a right to command you is the Christ who saves you. He has the absolute authority to do as He will with your restored spiritual powers, because He has bestowed them all upon you...He is the King because He is the Savior. He rules because He has redeemed. He begins with giving, and it is only afterward that He commands".⁶⁶

Most important, however, by this miracle our Lord sets Himself forth as the Son of God. In the subsequent part of the chapter, the "Jews", by which is meant His enemies, tried unsuccessfully to trap Him and then to kill Him, because "He had done these things on the Sabbath". But Jesus answered all

⁶⁶ Maclaren, Op. cit., St. John, p.240.

their gainsayings with the words: "My Father worketh hitherto, and I work". Undoubtedly, Christ had the intention by this miracle to sweep away the maze of man-made restrictions concerning the Sabbath, and thereby to give a clearer revelation of what the keeping of the Sabbath included. By doing so, He made this great claim that His work and God's work are one - that He is the eternal Son of God. We notice that the command to walk came from Jesus' will alone - the fact that it was efficacious shows the concurrence of His will with the will of God. He states that since both have the same will and work, He is no more a breaker of the Sabbath than God, and He is God.⁶⁷

It is interesting also to note the connection which Christ makes between sin and disease. He tells the man to sin no more, "lest a worse thing come upon thee". What past sin this man may have been guilty of, we do not know. But the man's conscience could interpret that warning. He fell once, and his punishment was sore. If he fall again, it will be all the worse.

Although we cannot definitely fix the time and place of the next miracle, the cleansing of the leper (Mt.8), we can still place it quite accurately. Matthew tells us that it was "down from the mountain". Mark adds that it was in "Galilee".

⁶⁷ Maclaren, Op. cit., St. Mark, pp.52-55.

And Luke speaks of a "certain city". It was, therefore, at some point in His Galilean ministry, undertaken for the preaching of the Gospel and the healing of the sick, that this miracle was wrought. From Mark's description, we conclude that it was probably the day after the miracles at Capernaum. The persons involved in this drama of mercy and might are Jesus, the leper, and the multitude.

Because of the restrictions placed on lepers by the Levitical law, this man probably at first accosted Jesus from a distance, and then drew near. As Doctor Luke diagnosed the case, the man was "full of leprosy" (pleres lepeas). What is noteworthy about the man is the way he made his request for healing. It was a declaration of great faith. He said: "If Thou wilt (not canst), Thou canst make me clean". He had no doubt as to the Lord's ability to heal. How he came to such faith, we cannot definitely tell. No doubt he had heard of, or even seen from a distance, some of the miracles and thus gained an unwavering assurance that the Lord could heal him, if He so willed.

It must have been a pitiable sight, for we are told that the Lord was moved with compassion. And unique, indeed, was the manner in which the Lord acted. According to Lev. 5, 3, it would defile one to touch a leper, but that is exactly what Christ did. He touched the man. All real sympathy will react

in that way. Our Savior is not turned away by the loathsomeness of the disease, nor by the destroying pestilence beneath it. But there is something more significant in that touch of our Lord. It is another example of the variety in the methods which He employed to carry out the miracle. Sometimes He works at a distance; sometimes He requires the proximity of the person to be healed; sometimes He works by a single word; sometimes by a word and a touch, or some other means, as the saliva that was put on the tongue and in the ears of the deaf, and on the eyes of the blind. So the divine work varies according to His pleasure, and always for a special purpose. He shows by this, first of all, that He is not bound as with a secret magic formula. Furthermore, it is an aid to faith - condescending to man's weakness, "He gives these poor sense-born natures a ladder by which their faith in His healing power might climb, so in the manner of His revelation and communication of His spiritual gifts, there is provision for the wants of men".⁶⁸

Yes, by that touch, Jesus put Himself in sympathy with the leper, which was definitely an aid to faith. Dr. Taylor reminds us of that very suggestive scene in Uncle Tom's Cabin, "when Miss Ophelia was compelled to revise all her theories about the training of Topsy, by overhearing the dark little

⁶⁸ Maclaren, Op. cit., St. Mark, p.55.

wooly head saying to some of the other slaves, "La! Miss Pheely would no more touch me than she would a toad".⁶⁹

By that touch, then, Christ "straightway sent him out", cleansed, euthēs exebalon auton. This phrase is the same as the strong Greek word used for casting out the desecrators of the temple (Mk.11,15). The writer does not mean to impute real anger to Christ, but only a desire that the man should lose no time in fulfilling the command to show himself to the priest who would testify to the people about the completeness of the cure.⁷⁰

Thereupon Christ sternly charged the man: "See thou tell no man!" Why was this silence enjoined? One of the purposes of the miracles as a whole, as we have seen, was to draw attention to Himself. Various reasons are suggested, of which we shall mention two. From Mk.1,44, it is suggested that he should tell no man until he has the approval of the priest. Possibly the reason for this limitation is that the enemies of our Savior might try to deny that a miracle had been performed. They might say that it was an act of collusion and deceit. But if the priest verified it, it would be difficult to gainsay. The other reason is suggested by Mt.17,9, the transfiguration scene. There Jesus said: "Tell the vision to no man, until the Son of Man be risen again

⁶⁹ Taylor, Op. cit., p.118.

⁷⁰ See Lev.14,2.4.7; Luke 17,14.

from the dead". There is the possibility that the motive of Christ in commanding silence is that these miracles would be more valuable to Him and the spreading of His Kingdom if they were revealed after His resurrection.

What were the effects of the miracle? The command of Christ was obeyed. The leprosy left the man. He was perfectly cleansed. The multitude was greatly moved. The result of this was that Christ could not openly enter into a city. If He would, He would immediately be surrounded by vast throngs. Hence, the work of our Lord was retarded somewhat. This cure and the popularity it caused may have been one of the factors which so abruptly brought Christ's synagogue ministry to an end.⁷¹

Why is this miracle recorded? What end does it serve? First of all, it again shows that Christ has power over disease. All and every disease has to obey His command immediately. And the power (dunamis) to work the miracle also shows His authority (exousia) to work it.

Furthermore, it gives a clearer picture of Christ's life. Leprosy was particularly selected by the law of Moses to be the physical analogue to the moral malady of sin. Other diseases might have been chosen, but possibly because of its ghastly nature and revolting accompaniments, leprosy was re-

⁷¹ Nicoll, Expositor's Greek Testament, p. 347.

garded in this way as a type of sin.⁷²

The prime reason for Jesus' coming into the world is, as the angel told Joseph, that "He shall save His people from their sins"(Mt.1,21). Sin and the power of Satan over man were the chief enemies which He had come to destroy. Hence, by healing the man of this disease, Jesus preached a sermon illustrating the purpose of His life - once for all to destroy sin.

One more point is brought out by this miracle. When Christ sent the man to the priest, He also showed that He came "not to destroy the law". Very easily could He have dismissed the man without any regard for the priest or his function. Indeed, He came to teach the people the true meaning of the law, although, by doing just that, He was accused of breaking it. But here we have an indication to the contrary.

A question which has aroused much discussion is that of demoniacal possession, as reported in the Sacred Record. Many

⁷² Some of the features of this disease and the patient's attitude toward it, is set forth by W. H. Sallmon in the words: "It was incurable by man, 2 Kings 5,7; rent garments, Lev.13,45; mourning for self as dead; head bare, Num.6,9; as if defiled by communion with the dead; lip covered, Ezek.24,17; The same instruments used in the restoration of a leper to society are used in cleansing one who was defiled by a dead body or anything pertaining to death, cf. Num.16,6 and Lev.17,7. The leper was shut out of the camp as one dead, Lev.13,46; Num.5,2-4". W. H. Sallmon, Studies in the Miracles of Christ, pp.16-17.

simply deny it, because, as it is alleged, there is no trace of it today. They diagnose the cases mentioned in the Bible as some form of epilepsy or insanity. But it is quite possible and plausible to believe that when Christ came into the world to destroy him, the devil mustered all his forces to make His work ineffective.

But what is demoniacal possession?⁷³ Is it just a superstitious term used to describe illnesses the cause of which was unknown at the time? The words of our Lord Himself are not reconcilable with that theory. He never speaks of demoniacs as being persons merely of disordered intellects, but always as subjects in the possession of an alien spiritual power. Repeatedly we read of Him addressing the evil spirits as totally separate and distinct from their victim. The argument that He merely humored the current opinion of the day militates against the very holiness and sinlessness of Christ. He never would have used language to confirm so serious an error, which made people accept something that in truth did not exist. Furthermore, upon two occasions (Mt. 9, 32 and Mt. 12, 22) one dumb, or dumb and blind are brought to Jesus

⁷³ According to Trench, the most common name in Scripture for one possessed is daimonizomenos (Mt. 4, 24, and often). Besides this, daimonistheis (Mk. 5, 18; Lk. 8, 36); anthropos en pneumati akatharto (Mk. 1, 23); echonton pneumata akatharta (Acts 8, 7); echon daimona (Lk. 8, 27); anthropos echon pneuma daimoniou akathartou (Lk. 4, 33). Other more general descriptions, kata katadunasteuomenous hypo tou diabolou (Acts 10, 38); ochloumenous hypo pneumatou akatharton (Lk. 6, 18; Acts 5, 16). Trench, Op. cit., p. 125.

in whom the defects are attributed to possession. But in Mark 7,32, another deaf and dumb is made the subject of Christ's healing power. In this instance, however, it is the evident intention of the Evangelist to describe him as suffering only a natural defect.

What was the condition which our Lord and His apostles described by this name? By way of preface, we may say a little about the head of the kingdom of evil and his relation to the world. His opposition to the will of God is most real. And from this evil will Scripture derives all the evil that is in the universe. What does the Bible mean, then, when it speaks of men as having devils? Is their evil ethical or merely physical? It is not merely physical. No doubt, the suffering of the "patient" was great. But if we consider it to be only another example of the mighty woe which Satan brought upon our race, we err. Neither, on the other hand, is it a purely ethical evil; we have in the demoniac something else than just a very great sinner, or a chief servant of the devil, who willingly and consciously serves him. He is one of the unhappiest, but not one of the guiltiest, of our race. In the demoniac, then, we find an alien power who has gained the mastery over him and now is cruelly lording it over him. Another is ruling his soul and has cast down the rightful owner: and the man knows this. But of his own power, there is not too much that he can do about it.⁷⁴ Let us see how

⁷⁴ Trench, Op. cit., pp.126-132.

Jesus dealt with such cases.

After turning the storm into a calm, our Lord landed with His disciples on the eastern shore of the Sea of Galilee, in a locality which is called by Mark and Luke "the country of the Gadarenes". The persons involved in the miracle under consideration are the two possessed men, the whole city, and Jesus Christ.

Some objections are made as to the actuality of this miracle of the healing of the demoniacs, because there appears to be a discrepancy in the Sacred Record. Matthew mentions two demoniacs, while Mark and Luke mention only one. This is, however, nothing to get excited about, because it is easily explained. The one was more notable and fierce, and thus attracted the attention. The other, in the meanwhile, fades into the background. It would be the same if a large cathedral were burning, and a garage along side of it caught fire also. The spectators would pay attention only to the cathedral. And, while we are on the subject, we have an excellent example of undesigned coincidence. Luke reports (8,27) that the demoniac was without clothes, but Mark (5,15) implies as much.

The awful picture of this demoniac is either painted from life, or it is one of the most superb examples of imagination. We see the quiet landing on the eastern shore of the Sea of Galilee, and can almost hear the fiendish, unworldly shrieks

of the demon-ridden man as he hurries to meet them, perhaps with hostile intent. The dreadful characteristics of his state are sharply pictured. He lived in the rock-hewn tombs which overhang the beach, for it was common "knowledge" that the demons frequented such places. He had superhuman strength. Fetters and manacles were easily snapped by him. Deriving some insane satisfaction from his own wounds, he had gashed himself with splinters of rock. Sighting Jesus from afar, he ran toward Him. Such is the introduction to the narrative.

When Christ told the unclean spirit to come out, He was answered by a howl of fear and hate. Whatever dumb yearning after Jesus may have been in the oppressed human consciousness, his words were a shriek of terror and recoil. This recognition of Christ by the man is not difficult to explain if we believe that others than the suffered looked through his wild eyes and spoke in his loud voice. To be sure, God's supremacy and loftiness, and Christ's nature, are recognized, but only the more abhorred. These devils use the name of God to sway Jesus, to becloud the issue, but it has no power to turn this hatred into submission.

Christ asks the man: "What is thy name?" This question is asked perhaps to show the power of possession, and also to recall personality, and strengthen consciousness in the man. It is another one of the ways our Lord used to prepare the man

for a complete cure. In the reply, "My name is Legion, for we are many", we note the momentary gleam in the man's first word showing his true self. He begins with "My", but he ends with "we", dropping back into the old confusion. But why Legion? Perhaps this poor man had witnessed the stalwart and strong Roman legions crush nations. And, consequently, he felt himself conquered by a similar, overwhelming array of enemies.⁷⁵

There were some swine grazing not too far away from the place where this incident occurred. The devils, through the man, asked permission to go into them. Jesus gave them leave, that is, He did not prevent them. A question, consequently, has been raised about Christ's right to destroy property. We can answer that in two ways. Jesus has complete power and dominion over all things. Everything is His, for He created all. If the purposes served by the destruction of property or animal life are beneficent and lofty, certainly this leaves no blemish on His goodness or honesty. Which was better, that the herd should live and fatten, or that a man should be delivered from devils and that they who saw it become assured of the deliverance and Christ's saving power? Certainly the latter. The other view is this: Christ did not command the devils to go into the swine; He merely expelled them from the man; everything after that was merely permissive.⁷⁶

⁷⁵ Maclaren, Op. cit., St. Mark, p.182.

⁷⁶ Trench, Op. cit., p.143.

What were the effects of this miracle? When the terrified Gerasenes came upon the scene after learning what had happened, they besought Jesus to leave them. Although they saw the man, now clothed and freed from his dire possession, they could not rejoice with him. Instead, the loss of their herds preys upon their mind. Perhaps they heard that even more of their wealth and property might go the same way, if this Christ remained in their country. Therefore, spurning the salvation that might have been theirs, they beseech our Savior to leave. The man who had been possessed, however, reacted entirely differently. He clung to Christ and besought Him that he might stay with Him. Conscious weakness and grateful love probably prompted this prayer. Christ, nevertheless, did not grant his request, but showed him how he could demonstrate his thankfulness and at the same time keep the devils from again gaining possession of him. That way was to "Go home to thy friends, and tell them how great things the Lord hath done for thee, and hath had compassion on thee". How successful he was in winning souls for the Kingdom of salvation we are not told, but his testimony was so forceful that "all men did marvel" (Mk. 5, 20).

This miracle shows our Lord's dominion over demons, as He had already shown it over disease and nature. It was but a foreshadowing of the time when the devil and all his wicked hosts would be eternally bound and powerless, while the believers

would be eternally free from all temptations and possessions of hell. It is a graphic demonstration of the purpose of Christ's coming to "destroy the works of the devil".

Shortly after the feeding of the five thousand on the shore of the Lake of Tiberias, our Savior came to the region which bordered on the cities of Tyre and Sidon. It was here that one of the most marvelous exhibitions of faith was made. So great was it that our Lord marveled. The person who showed such faith was the Syrophenician woman.

Christ probably went to this place, which was on the extreme northwestern boundary of the land of Promise, to seek rest and retirement. Mark tells us that "He entered into a house, and would have no man know it". But, as it usually turned out to be, His presence could not be kept a secret. A woman, belonging to the old Canaanitish race, came into the house and earnestly pleaded for help. Her daughter was a victim of demoniacal possession. No doubt, she had heard of some of His wonderful works, and, living so very near the Jews, had a little knowledge of the prophecies concerning the Messiah. So it was that she addressed Him as the Son of David. But strange, indeed, is our Lord's attitude. We are told that "He answered her not a word". In fact, as if to end the interview then and there, it would seem that He left the house. But, undaunted and not to be shaken off, she followed Him with her entreaties.

Still our Lord remained silent. The disciples, who seem to have become embarrassed by her pleadings, are the first ones to speak. They ask Christ to send her away. We can well imagine what effect that must have had upon her. Friends and companions of Christ were against her. They did not want her to follow them. The Great Physician now speaks for the first time, but only to the disciples: "I am not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel". She knew that that remark was meant for her, and it appeared to be a refusal, a death-blow to her hopes for her daughter. But it only served to make her more earnest, for she came and fell at His feet, and cried: "Lord, help me!" For the first time, then, He addressed her directly: "It is not meet to take the children's bread, and to cast it to dogs." This statement seems to be unusually cold. He lets her know that she is not considered to be on a par and equal with the chosen people. Moreover, from the manner in which the words are spoken, it seems to be a blunt statement refusing her request. But she was determined, and was not to be repulsed. Her reply shows her courage and persistence. She was going to be heard! "Truth, Lord, yet the dogs eat of the crumbs which fall from their master's table." Thus, from what seemed a rebuff, she drew a plea. Our Lord could no longer contain Himself, but marvelled at such a faith. Granting her request, He healed her daughter that very hour.

The action of our Lord is, indeed, strange. It seems so unlike the way we usually see Him acting. It is not unaccountable, however; for our Lord desired to help not only the woman's daughter, but also the woman herself. Thus He acted to test and strengthen her faith. Often the Lord tests people today by not answering their prayers at once. "His delays to grant their requests are drops of acid which prove whether or not they are genuine gold". When this woman came, she addressed Him as the Son of David. Now He wanted to lead her up to something higher. And His way of treating her did just that. Resistance is always necessary for the development of strength. This is true spiritually as well as physically. Hence, having stood the test, she gained the greater benefit.⁷⁷

But our Savior also wanted to teach His disciples a lesson which they would never forget, and which would prepare them for their future work. By dealing with this woman, by granting her request, He crossed the line between the chosen race and the "lesser breeds". He proclaimed, in effect, that His Gospel knew no restrictions, that He had come to seek and to save the lost no matter who or where they might be. He drew no lines; "or rather, the lines which He drew were vertical and not horizontal - between right and wrong; between sin and righteousness; between life and death." It is at this place

⁷⁷ Taylor, Op. cit., pp. 295-300.

in the history of the disciples, that we might find the beginning to the Acts of the Apostles.⁷⁸

Two things which particularly the miracles of healing reveal about the character of Jesus are His sympathy and His love. Everywhere on the pages of the sacred Gospel we find instant, instinctive, outgoing sympathy. Suffering in any form moved Him to compassion. Bodily suffering as well as spiritual destitution mattered to Him enormously. And that sympathy of our Savior did not diminish as time went on and as He dealt more and more with suffering mankind, but rather seemed to grow and increase. Furthermore, His pity was not of the kind that weakens its object, as so often pity among mortals does. His, rather, braced, strengthened, prepared for resistance and action. It lifted men out of the pit of hopelessness and filled their hearts with courage.

The other element in Christ's character which is put in focus for us by these miracles is His great love. Of course, we would still know of its greatness and its depths without them. The fact that He left His great throne of glory and perfection to come, and suffer, and die for sinful mankind, His enemies, is the ultimate revelation of what true love is. But the account of it in these miracles is an aid to our understanding of it and helps to keep it before our minds.

⁷⁸ Calkins, Op. cit., p.131.

He loved men of all sorts and conditions. This love has been and still is the wonder of the world.

Certain characteristics of that love are revealed to us which merit our attention. First of all, it was not a generalized love of men in the mass. It was not like the flighty, flimsy "brotherly love", that we hear bantered around so much today. Rather, it is focused on concrete care of personal need. Over and over again we read such expressions as "a certain man". His was not a generalized pity or abstract compassion, but personal and individual.⁷⁹

His love was also comprehensive. It included all. He was willing to heal and to help a centurion's servant as well as a Syrophoenician woman's daughter; a demoniac boy as well as Jairus' daughter. The human heart, regardless of its culture, environment, and worldly attainments - that was the object of His love.

⁷⁹ Calkins, Op. cit., pp.19-24.

Chapter Four.
The Nature Miracles.

Doubtless all who believe in the reality of miracles will agree that their purpose, when they were wrought, was to confirm in men belief in Jesus Christ - that He was what He claimed to be, and that all He said was absolute truth, the eternal truth of God. And we cannot regard them too highly in this respect. Their value was not so much in their power to appeal to the hostile and the sceptical, or even to attract the mass of common people, as to confirm the faith of the small band of His chosen disciples, by working in them a full and assured faith by means of "infallible" proofs. This is important. After Christ's resurrection and ascension, these men were going to be His messengers. They were the ones who would journey into the hiways and biways of life, into palace and hovel, into all the world. It was necessary, then, that they particularly be filled with the heavenly dynamite of that confession and conviction: "We believe and are sure that Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God!"

Christ, accordingly, paid particular attention to His immediate students in His "seminary". He explained many mysteries to them privately; He had long discussions with them during Holy Week; He gave them a post-graduate or refresher course after His resurrection and before His ascension. But, that was not all. Throughout His public ministry, before they realized fully that their Lord would leave them,

the disciples were witness to a special class of miracles, which, it seems, was wrought especially for their growth, development and benefit. That class was the nature miracles. these included the manifestation of power upon Nature and the organic world, upon the inorganic world, in His own nature. The first of these which we shall consider is the First Miraculous Draught of Fishes.

On this occasion four disciples, Peter, Andrew, James and John, were present. He had taken them with Him to Cana, where they were eye-witnesses of His first miracle, whereby He manifested unto them His glory. Because of this, His disciples believed on Him. Up to the time of the third miracle, our Lord had not called upon them to forsake their occupations to follow Him. But at this occasion, the time had come when it was necessary for them to do this. He was about to choose twelve, that they might be with Him, that He might send them forth to preach.*.that is, it was time for them to enter fully upon the course of instruction which would qualify them to be the first heralds of the glorious Gospel of salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. To do this, they must not only leave home and family, father and mother, but they must abandon the trade by which they earned daily bread for themselves and those dependent on them. To do this, a measure of faith was required which hitherto they had no occasion to exercise. It

is easy for us to say, as we look back, that they should have trusted Him who could turn water into wine; heal disease by a silent command; and could provide food for His followers. We must remember, however, that His disciples were as yet only babes in the faith, who needed the plainest and the simplest lessons. Therefore, before He gave them the great command: "Follow Me!" , He gave them the assurance that He was able to supply all their need, by an impressive object lesson.⁸⁰ We may see in the scene depicted on the shore of the Sea of Galilee an epitome of a whole book of instruction in evangelistic work.

Many people had pressed upon Him to hear His word as He was by the lake of Gennesaret. As He looked for a place to deliver His message, Christ saw two empty ships at the shore. Boarding one of them, He taught the people from it. After He was finished, our Lord said to Simon: "Launch out into the deep, and let down your nets for a draught!" The fisherman, however, was astonished and replied, not in unbelief, but in amazement: "Master, we have toiled all night and have taken nothing; nevertheless, at Thy word I will let down the net." He did not mean to say that he feared that the attempt would be useless, because the night was always the best time to fish, and because, having been unsuccessful then, there was little

⁸⁰ N. S. Burton, Christ Teaching by Miracles, pp. 410-411.

possibility of catching anything in broad daylight. His answer was a confession of failure, yet, at the same time, one of faith. Peter knew something of Him who had given that direction. He had seen some of the miracles which He had performed. His obedience was the fruit of faith, and not of superstition. That faith was rewarded bountifully. No sooner had they gone out and let down the nets than they were filled so that the nets began to tear.⁸¹

Some have held the miraculous element to have been merely this that Christ by His omniscience knew that now there were fishes in that spot. But we cannot weaken the miracle in this way. Rather we should look upon Christ as the Lord of nature, able, by the power of His will, to draw and guide unconscious creatures so that they serve the higher interests of His kingdom. He appears here, indeed, as the second Adam, in whom the words of the Psalmist find fulfillment: "Thou madest Him to have dominion over the works of Thy hands; Thou hast put all things under His feet...the fowl of the air, and the fish of the sea, and whatsoever passeth through the paths of the sea"(Ps. 8, 6.8).⁸²

The keynote of this whole event is the saying of Jesus: "Fear not, from henceforth thou shalt catch men." The effect of this miracle upon Peter had been electric. Yielding, as he

⁸¹ Taylor, Op. cit., pp.63-64.

⁸² Trench, Op. cit., p.109.

so often did, to the impulse of the moment, Peter saw the glory of Christ revealed there and then by that draught of fishes. Conscious, furthermore, of his own great shortcomings and weaknesses and sinfulness, he fell down at Jesus' feet and prayed: "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord!" These words show his great concern for his soul. It was his rash way of saying what Isaiah exclaimed: "Woe is me, for I am undone, for I am a man of unclean lips, for mine eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts!" (Is. 6, 5). But Jesus calmed his fears by directing his thoughts to the lesson of this miracle. It was as if our Lord had said: "Learn from this incident that, as these fish were caught from the sea, so shall you catch men from the sea of sin." Peter did not fully understand all the points of this lesson that day, but as he later went forth, the lesson of this day from the words and deeds of His Master would stand out before him.⁸³

The Sea of Galilee lies 655 feet below the level of the Mediterranean. The high hills on the eastern side are broken here and there by deep ravines which act as funnels for the winds which are aroused by the rapid drop in temperature at sunset. Sudden squalls of great intensity, dying away as suddenly and unexpectedly as they arose, are not uncommon.⁸⁴ Such a gale arose when Jesus had bidden His disciples to take

⁸³ Burton, Op. cit., p. 411.

⁸⁴ Sallmon, Op. cit., p. 32.

Him to the "other side", on the day on which the Lord had spoken the parable of the Sower, as recorded in the thirteenth chapter of St. Matthew's Gospel. The persons involved in the miracle of the stilling of the tempest are Jesus Christ, His disciples, and others in attendant boats.

Weary from an exhausting day's work, our Lord went to the rear of the ship, and threw Himself back upon the cushion, which was a usual part of the furnishing of such a tiny craft, and fell fast asleep. They had not gone far when a great storm arose. It was very violent; waves broke over the ship, so that it began to fill with water. At first, we imagine, the disciples were unafraid. Why should they be? They were expert boatmen. In their fishing careers they undoubtedly had encountered many such storms. They applied all their skill to the handling of the boat. But the more they tried the more futile their attempts seemed to be. They had relied on their own strength, and it had failed. In an agony of earnestness, not unmingled with disappointed surprise, they awoke their Lord with the anguished exclamation: "Master, carest Thou not that we perish?" It was a cry of fear. Thereupon, Christ arose and "rebuked the winds and the sea; and there was a great calm."

That cry of the disciples showed at least some faith. They had been with Him now almost constantly. They had seen

the lame, the halt, the blind, come to Him for help, and receive it. They knew His ministrations of mercy were countless. His ready response to every needy request, innumerable. They knew that He had helped others, and that He could help them. That cry of the disciples, however, showed a definite weakness of faith. If their faith in the Lord Jesus had been perfect, they would not have given way to panic, and they would not have been rebuked. They would have realized that asleep or awake, He was conscious of their needs and ready to help them.

Usually after such a storm the swell on the water remains for quite some time after the wind has died down. But at the command of our Lord: "Peace, be still!", the lake became calm at once, or as the old Scottish metrical version of the 107th Psalm puts it:

The storm is changed into a calm
At His command and will;
So that the waves which raged before
Now quiet are and still.⁸⁵

Having removed the cause of the alarm of His followers, our Lord began to deal with them personally, and said: "Why are ye fearful, O ye of little faith?" This question penetrates to the core of their difficulty. "He accuses them not simply of their little faith (Mt.6,30), their want of confidence in the protecting hand of Providence; but His reproach is this, that they had denied their faith in Him, the Messiah".⁸⁶

⁸⁵ Taylor, Op. cit., p.205.

⁸⁶ Steinmeyer, quoted by Sallmon, Op. cit., p.33

The Evangelist proceeds to describe the moral effect that the remarkable stilling of the tempest had on the minds of those in the ship, and possibly those that were in the "other little ships", which St. Mark reveals were sailing in their company. They ask: "What manner of man is this, that even the winds and the sea obey Him?" That exclamation can only find its answer and meaning in the exclamation of the Psalmist: "O Lord God of hosts, who is like unto Thee? Thou rulest the raging sea: when the waves thereof arise, Thou stillest them." (Ps. 89, 8-9).

As stated before, the general purpose of these miracles on nature was to instruct and train the twelve disciples for the arduous task which lay before them. They were presently going to face a hostile world, be persecuted, yes, killed, for their Master and the spreading of His great Church. This miracle prepared them for that, in that it was a revelation of their Master and Lord to them. He, by this miracle, was bringing home to them the thought of God as a Father who knows about and cares for His children however desperate may be their peril and need. And as they learned by such experiences to obey His will and trust in Him, they were beginning to really live by faith. Their faith was being drawn out, and in the final result they learned that Christ was in truth the very God incarnate. This experience was essentially con-

nected with their growth in faith and love and hope in the Christ. From this, they gained the courage to preach to prince and pauper, king and slave, and tell them of the love which God has shown to mankind in Jesus.⁸⁷

The feeding of the five thousand (Jn.6), shortly before the third Passover in our Lord's ministry, had aroused the multitudes to a high pitch of enthusiasm. They saw in Him an ideal King who would free them from the bondage of Rome and at the same time take care of their bodily needs. Hence, they tried to take Him by force and make Him their King. In seeking to make Christ a King after their own pattern and concepts, they unwittingly were doing their best to wreck the cause for which He had come into the world. At the same time, they were tempting Him in much the same way that Satan had on the mountain when he offered Him the crown without the cross. Therefore, for His own sake, as well as theirs, "He sent the multitudes away".⁸⁸

But the disciples, at this stage in their development and spiritual growth, were more in sympathy with the crowds than with Jesus. They had entertained the secret notions and yearning that their Master would establish Himself as an earthly emperor. It was dangerous, then, to let them remain in the company of this multitude while this zeal and frenzy

⁸⁷ Shafto, Op. cit., p.26.

⁸⁸ Taylor, Op. cit., pp.282-283.

was upon them. Accordingly, our Lord "constrained them to get into a boat, and go before Him unto the other side". Since they were more or less unwilling to go, as was natural because of the circumstances just explained, Christ had to use a kind of force to get them to depart. And as soon as He had prevailed on them to go, He went up into a mountain alone to find rest and solace for Himself in fellowship with His Father.⁸⁹

The sea was rough and the winds were "contrary". Because of this, at the "fourth watch of the night", they had scarcely traveled more than half way across the sea. Suddenly, they saw their Lord "walking on the sea",⁹⁰ and they became terrified and cried out: "It is a spirit".⁹¹ It is often so. The Lord comes to His people in some unfamiliar form - in the shape of some affliction, in the way of some cross, and they do not know Him. Their Lord, bringing blessings to them, nevertheless at such times seems to be as some phantom in the night. But Christ "would have passed them by". Doubtless this action of our Lord is strange to those to whom the entire life of faith is strange. He would seem to pass them by, seem to forsake them, in order to evoke their prayer that He would not pass them by, that He would not forsake them. We have a similar example of this when He walked with the two

⁸⁹ Taylor, Op. cit., p.283.

⁹⁰ It is interesting to note that the Egyptian sign of impossibility is two feet on the water. It reminds us that with "God nothing is impossible".

⁹¹ The Greek word is fantasma not pneuma. R.V. correctly translates "apparition".

disciples to Emmaus, after His resurrection. There, also, "He made as though He would have gone further" (Lk. 24, 28), thus drawing out the plea to remain. He does this to quicken their faith by having them "call upon Him in the day of trouble".

Thereupon, He allays their fears with the words: "Be of good cheer; it is I; be not afraid!" And now, Peter, in his customary impulsiveness, replies: "Lord, if it be Thou, bid me come unto thee on the water!" That "if" must not be interpreted as implying doubt as to Whom he was addressing. A Thomas might have required that the Savior come into the boat so that he could make sure who He was. His words mean, rather, "since it is Thou". He knows that Christ must give the command before he could walk on the water. But, in that "bid me", the fault lay. He wants to outdo and outdare the other disciples. He wants to show them the greatness of his trust and confidence. It is very similar to that other action of his, when he said: "Although all shall be offended, yet will not I!"

Again we have an insight into the wisdom and love our Savior employed in His dealing with and teaching men. Had our Lord commanded him to remain where he was, He would have at the same time checked the future outbreaks of his fervent spirit, which, when purified and pointed in the proper direction, were to carry him far in doing the Lord's work. But

Christ still saw the fault in that request. In His command, "Come", our Lord omits the "I bid", and "unto Me", for which Peter had asked. It is as if He said: "Come if thou wilt, make the experiment, if you want to". It was merely a permissive "Come". There was assurance, however, that he would be protected, but not that he would successfully complete the journey. The outcome of the issue depended upon Peter's faith.⁹²

Peter did dare to get out of the boat. For awhile he was successful. He was walking on the water to Jesus. But, the "wind was boisterous and he was afraid and began to sink". When he cried: "Lord, save me!" our Lord stretched forth His hand and caught him. Then followed the gracious rebuke. "Oh thou of little faith!" By these words Jesus did not check any of the future impulses of His servant's boldness but rather encouraged them, showing him how he could do all things through Christ strengthening him. Christ taught him that his fault lay not in undertaking too much, but that he relied too little upon Him who would have given him the strength to carry out that and other undertakings. When this singular episode was over, Jesus went into the boat with His followers; the wind ceased; they reached land immediately. They that had been in the boat came and worshipped Him and declared: "Of a truth thou art the Son of God!" (Mt. 14, 22-32).

⁹² Trench, Op. cit., pp. 230-233.

This miracle fulfills a number of purposes. First of all, it proves His Deity. He has omnipotent power, which is divine power. The disciples were conscious of what had taken place by calling Him "the Son of God". Armed with that knowledge and conviction, they could confidently and courageously go into all the world and preach that fact. They would not do so timidly and half-heartedly, but openly and bravely, because that conviction was based upon personal knowledge and came from personal observation.

Peter and the other disciples were taught another important lesson in faith. They learned, that looking to and trusting in Jesus, gave security. As Moody once described this:

Someone has said there are three ways to look. If you want to be wretched, look within; if you wish to be distracted, look around; but if you would have peace, look up! Peter looked away from Christ, and he immediately began to sink. The Master said to him, 'O, thou of little faith, wherefore didst thou doubt?' He had God's eternal word which was sure footing, and better than either marble, granite or iron; but the moment he took his eyes off Christ, down he went. Those who look around cannot see how unstable and dishonoring is their walk. We want to look straight at the 'Author and Finisher of our faith'.⁹³

There is one other consideration which we must weigh in any attempt to appraise these stories aright. If Christ's was a unique personality - and there will be few to deny this - what may be proper to Him either in or out of 'nature' will also be unique. "Never man spake as this man" has its true consequence "never man wrought like this man". In any consistent character acts and words go together, confirming and completing each other.⁹⁴

⁹³ Quoted by Sallmon, Op. cit., p.77.

⁹⁴ Shafto, Op. cit., p.31.

Throughout our study of our Savior's actions and conduct we have seen nothing but kindness and love flow forth from Him. As we see Him moving from place to place in the Holy Land, suffering, pain, anxiety, and care are removed from men's bodies and souls. The lame, the halt, the blind come to Him for healing - and they receive it. Men sick of heart come to Him for comfort and consolation, and it is given them. Men sick with sin and chained to the depravity of their nature come to Him for hope and life, and they are not disappointed. But on one occasion, Christ seems entirely to reverse Himself. We see nothing but wrath and indignation. At first glance, the Christ who caused the fig tree to become withered, (Mk. 11, 12-4) seems incompatible with the Christ who healed and gave life. This single miracle of destruction which He wrought has caused much discussion and disagreement. Let us examine the attending circumstances.

On Palm Sunday, after His triumphant entry into the city of Jerusalem, our Lord retired to Bethany, where He spent the night, not unlikely in the home of Mary, Martha, and Lazarus. The following day, the Monday of Holy Week, very early, perhaps not long after sun-rise, He was returning into the city and saw a fig-tree in full leaf. Naturally, therefore, He expected to find some figs on it with which to satisfy His hunger because, although it was not the season for figs, the tree had foliage. Since the leaves come after the tree has

fruit on it, He went to it and looked for the fruit. But there was none. Whereupon, He solemnly said: "No man eat fruit of thee hereafter, forever". His disciples were with Him and heard these words. On the evening they returned again to Bethany. The following morning, as they passed by, they saw the tree was dried up from the roots. They were surprised at this, and Peter remarked: "Master, behold, the fig-tree which Thou cursedst is withered away!" (Mk. 11, 20-21).

Many critics have pounced upon this miracle, one of whom has blasphemously remarked that Jesus, "out of humor after the controversy with His enemies, finds a target for His wrath in an innocent tree which bare naught but leaves and flowers at this season".⁹⁵ But that objection falls by the wayside when we consider the overall purpose which Christ had in mind when He acted as He did.

Some have said that if Christ were all-knowing, why did He go to the tree in the first place, since He should have known that He would find no fruit. Archbishop Trench explains it in this way:

Upon the first point, that the Lord approached the tree, appearing to expect fruit upon it, and yet knowing that He should find none, deceiving thereby those who were with Him, who no doubt believed that what He professed to look for, He expected to find, it is sufficient to observe, that a similar charge might be made against all figurative teaching, whether by word or deed: for in all such there is a worshipping of truth in the spirit and not in the letter; often a forsaking of it in the letter, for the better honoring and establishing of it in the spirit.

⁹⁵ Quoted by Arndt, Op. cit., p. 39.

⁹⁶ Trench, Op. cit., pp. 358-359.

That explanation is not satisfactory, however, because the accusation of deception is not fully refuted. There is a much simpler explanation, which is more in keeping with the facts. When Christ was speaking of the coming of Judgment Day, He said: "Of that day and that hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels which are in heaven, neither the Son, but the Father" (Mk.13,32). During the state of humiliation, according to His human nature, He did not know when the Judgment was coming. He Himself plainly states that as a fact. Although there were many occasions when He used the omniscience which was His according to His divine nature, and which was communicated to His human nature during the state of humiliation, yet He did not always make full use of it. If we apply that fact to this instance, we find that the accusation disappears. When Christ went to the fig-tree, He did not know that there were no figs there. As Peter or any of the other disciples might have expected to find fruit on the tree, because there was the indication of it by the presence of the leaves, so also our Lord expected it. When He failed to find any, He capitalized on the situation to teach His disciples the lesson which we shall discuss a little later.

Some have taken offense at the fact that He vented His anger on the tree. This is but a poor way of covering up

their real objection - that He ever should have put forth His anger at all; that God should ever reveal Himself as a God who will punish. But this is an important lesson for mankind to learn, which they might forget, as far as the teaching of the miracles went, but for this one - all the others being miracles of help and healing. Yet there is mercy revealed in this miracle. He did not, like Moses and Elijah, demonstrate the fact of God's holiness and His hatred of evil at the cost of many lives, but only at the cost of a single unfeeling tree. His miracles of kindness and grace were innumerable, and on men; His miracle of judgment was only one, and on a tree.⁹⁷

What purpose did Jesus have in mind when He wrought this miracle of destruction? We hold, it was a symbolic miracle, an acted parable, a prophecy. It was designed to show the sin of Israel, which was symbolized under this tree. Their sin was not so much that they were without fruit, but that they boasted of so much. Their true status would have been praiseworthy if only they admitted that without faith, without Christ, of their own power alone, they were incapable of anything, that all their righteousnesses were as filthy rags. But this is exactly what Israel refused to do. Other nations might have nothing of which to boast. But on closer

⁹⁷ Trench, Op. cit., p. 359.

inspection before the search-light of the holiness of God, the true essence and substance of righteousness was a much lacking in them as anywhere among the nations. Furthermore, the guilt of the chosen people was deeper and greater than that of other nations because they were hypocrites. They made a show of being holy, of bearing much fruit, but when one examines them closely, they were false.⁹⁸ They could not compensate for their sterility in true holiness, simply with the plea: "We have Abraham to our father!" They were utterly lacking in the faith of Abraham, and in the fruits of such faith, and as a result their outward show of righteousness was "nothing but leaves".

Moreover, from the reply of our Lord to Peter's observation that the tree was withered, we see that He wanted to teach them another lesson in faith which would serve them in good stead throughout their ministry. We are told that He said unto them: "Have faith in God. For verily I say unto you, that whosoever shall say unto this mountain, be thou removed, and be thou cast into the sea, and shall not doubt in his heart, but shall believe that those things which he saith shall come to pass, he shall have whatsoever he saith". Peter's words implied that in his heart he was drawing a contrast between the success of our Lord in working His

⁹⁸ Trench, Op. cit., p. 363.

miracles, and their failures. And our Lord showed them the secret of His success and their failure, in this exhortation to faith and prayer. Neander has summed up the lesson in this way:

Christ made use of their astonishment for a purpose very important in this last period of His stay with them, namely, to incite them to act themselves by the power of God; not to be so amazed at what He wrought by that power, but to remember that in communion with Him they would be able to do the same, and even greater things. The sense of His words, then, would be: 'You need not wonder at a result like this; the result was the least of it; you shall do still greater things by the power of God, if only you possess the great essential faith.'⁹⁹

On the third day after Philip and Nathaniel had attached themselves to our Savior, there was a marriage in Cana of Galilee. The mother of Jesus,¹⁰⁰ no doubt a very close friend or even a relative, was already there when Christ arrived. It is not strange to find our Lord at that festival, for He came to sanctify all life - to consecrate its times of joy as well as its times of sorrow. Too often people get the impression from only a cursory reading of His life, that Christ was interested only in the sadness and suffering, the pain and anxiety of His people. But, by His presence at this feast, He shows that He was concerned also that His people be happy and full of joy.

⁹⁹ Taylor, Op. cit., p. 420.

¹⁰⁰ It is interesting to note that John never mentions Mary by her name.

Since these marriage festivals sometimes lasted a whole week,¹⁰¹ it was not strange that the supply of wine at this festival was exhausted. Mary, evidently distressed at the embarrassments of that humble household, came to Jesus with the remark: "They have no wine". We know that this was Jesus' first miracle (Jn. 2,11), so she could not, from former displays of power and grace, expect a miracle. Her words simply implied a request for help.

Christ, however, seems to have been troubled by her interference. He replied: "Woman, what have I to do with thee? Mine hour is not yet come." There is no severity or disrespect, as some have maintained, implied in that term "Woman". It was rather a highly respectful and affectionate mode of address. (Compare John 20,13-15). He simply is repeating in a similar way what He had told her in the Temple when He was twelve years old. The earth-view of their relationship must cease - she could not intrude upon His Father's business.¹⁰² From henceforth His motto would be: "My Father and I!"¹⁰³ He, too, had seen the lack of wine. He probably was even then waiting for an opportunity to grant in His own way and in His own time help to the bride and groom.

¹⁰¹ Compare Gen. 29,27; Judg. 14,15; Tobit 9,12; 10,1.

¹⁰² Edersheim, Op. cit., Vol. I., p. 361.

¹⁰³ See Matt. 12,46-50.

Mary was gently checked by His words. She did not understand and yet she did understand. The reply of Jesus was not an absolute refusal. In the little words "not yet", she saw a distinct ray of hope; for she went to the servants and said to them: "Whatsoever He saith unto you, do it!" Near the entrance of the house there were six water-pots, "After the manner of the purifying of the Jews". Probably the supply was almost exhausted when our Lord gave the command to "fill the water-pots with water". Water is distinctly mentioned in view of what was to happen. In their zeal, the servants filled them to the brim. This is probably stated for the purpose of pointing out the large quantity, as well as to exclude the possibility of anyone adding anything to the water. Thereupon Christ told these servants to "draw out now and bear unto the governor of the feast". Some have regarded this to be "the superintendent of the banqueting-chamber", a servant whose duty it was to arrange the table-furniture and the courses, and to taste the food beforehand. Others have held that this was one of the guests selected to preside at the banquet according to the Greek and Roman custom. This latter view seems to be supported by the passage in the thirty-fifth chapter of Ecclesiasticus: "If thou be made the master of a feast, lift not thyself up, but be among them as one of the rest; take diligent care for them,

and so sit down. And when thou hast done all thy office, take thy place, that thou mayest be merry with them, and receive a crown for thy well ordering of the feast". As the success of the feast depended largely upon him, his selection was a matter of some thought and care. Plato says: "Must we not appoint a sober man and a wise to be our master of the revels? For is the ruler of drinkers himself young and drunken, and not over-wise, only by some special good fortune will he be saved from doing some great evil"(Laws, 840).¹⁰⁴

Before the servants brought a sample of the contents of the jars to the governor of the feast, something very remarkable and supernatural had happened. A situation which had threatened to become extremely embarrassing to all concerned had been relieved; for what they had poured in as water had turned into wine. The ruler was unaware of what had taken place. Thinking it to be some more of the stock of wine which the host had acquired, he mirthfully remarked that the bridegroom had deviated from the usual custom by serving the good wine last. Usually the best wine was offered first so that when the taste of the guests was somewhat dulled, an inferior vintage could be offered. We need not suppose from his remarks that the guests were well-nigh intoxicated. Here was a miracle. The wine was very real, and it was of the very best.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰⁴ Vincent, Word Studies in the New Testament, Vol. 2, pp. 81-82.

¹⁰⁵ Fahling, The Life of Christ, pp. 159-161.

Abruptly the narrative ends. There is a divine reticence in contrast to our human talkativeness. What the company thought, what Mary felt, what the bridegroom said, we can only guess. But John closes with the purpose of the miracle: "This beginning of miracles did Jesus in Cana of Galilee and manifested forth His glory."

The Evangelist John here expressly, and it would seem, pointedly excludes from all historic credit the miracles of the Infancy, which are found in such abundance in nearly all of the apocryphal Gospels. He means not merely that this was the first miracle which our Savior effected in Cana, but that this was the first miracle which He performed in His earthly sojourn. The whole church has always regarded these words as decisive on this point.

What was the purpose of Christ in doing this miracle? Was it merely to save a newly-married couple from embarrassment and shame? Surely it was not. But His motive goes much deeper. John gives us the answer with the words that "He manifested forth His glory". Any ordinary man, had he performed such a feat, would simply be showing forth the glory of God from Whom he received the power to work the miracle. But Christ, being God Himself, could manifest His own; for "glory" here must have its full emphasis. Assuredly it is no attribute which can be applied to mortals but only to God,

since it is actually a divine attribute. The divine Logos, as the absolute Light of the world, rays forth light from Himself, and this effluence is His "glory". During most of the time of His earthly stay, this glory, which He possessed and was in His essence, was tabernacled, hidden from the eyes of men. Now, in this His first work of power and grace, it burst through that covering, revealing itself to the spiritual eyes of His disciples. The result was that "they beheld His glory, the glory as of the only-begotten of the Father", and believed on Him.¹⁰⁶

This manifestation of His glory is emphasized still more by John's second reason for the miracle; because of it, His "disciples believed on Him". As far as a true understanding of His being and essence is concerned, His disciples were still babes and children. Up to that point, they were attracted to Him because of His words and forceful personality. But they must grow in stature and wisdom. They must understand as far as was humanly possible that He was the very God incarnate, and then go to all the world and preach this fact of salvation for mankind through their Lord. Thus this miracle, as well as all the miracles of nature, particularly confirmed, strengthened, and exalted their faith, who already believing on Him, "were capable of being lifted from faith to faith, advancing from faith in an earthly teacher to faith in a heavenly Lord".¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁶ Trench, Op. cit., p.94.

¹⁰⁷ ibid., p.95.

Chapter Five.
The Resurrection Miracles.

The accounts of the raising of the dead have always been attacked as if, in some way, they were more improbable than other miracles; and just as regularly they have been advanced by apologists as supreme examples of our Lord's almighty power. But the initial misconception is the same in either case; it is only from a purely human point of view that one miracle can be regarded as more wonderful than another, or more difficult to believe. We shall here confine ourselves to the consideration of one of these resurrection miracles.

It must always remain a mystery to us why the raising of Lazarus from the dead (John 11), so memorable in itself, should have been omitted by the three earlier Evangelists. Some have held that it was due particularly to the fact that while he lived, Lazarus' life was in danger. The Pharisees might seek the life of him, on whom one of the Lord's most famous miracles was wrought. Such an explanation is very far-fetched when we consider that Mark's Gospel was written at Rome, and Luke wrote to his friend, Theophilus, in Italy. Hence, even if they had included this miracle in their accounts, the life of Lazarus would not have been placed in danger. Others have maintained that the three earlier writers report chiefly the miracles which our Lord performed in Galilee, omitting those which were wrought in Jerusalem and its vicinity, which would exclude the one we are about to discuss. This

is perfectly true; in the final analysis, however, it is merely a re-statement of the fact which needs to be explained. It is almost impossible to find a suitable explanation for this omission.

After Lazarus, whom He loved, had died, Jesus journeyed from Perea to Bethany where the deceased had lived with his sisters, Mary and Martha. After comforting them by stating that the death of Lazarus occurred that the "Son of God might be glorified", our Savior inquired as to the location of the grave. He was told to "come and see". He, in Whom almighty power resided, now discloses true human emotions in a burst of tears. He is sorrowful with the sorrowful. Some of the Jews were moved at this display of loving sympathy, and remarked: "Behold how He loved him!" Others, however, could make nothing of His tears; to them they were a puzzle and riddle. Why had He not come in time to heal him? Was it unwillingness or inability? In a half-perplexed, half-mocking way, they asked: "Could not this man which opened the eyes of the blind have caused that even this man should not have died?" If He did not have the power to raise this dead man, in what position did that place the other miracles? If He were unwilling to do so, why the tears?¹⁰⁸

This unkind attitude on the part of the Jews caused

¹⁰⁸ Fahling, Op. cit., p.487.

Jesus to groan again as He neared the grave. When they had arrived, Jesus commanded them to take away the stone. To this Martha, who had joined the group again, remonstrated: "Lord, by this time he stinketh; for he hath been dead four days". But Jesus replied: "Said I not unto thee that, if thou wouldest believe, thou shouldest see the glory of God?" Regardless, then, of the objection of Martha and possibly because it was perceived that He had some end in mind, the stone was rolled away. Thereupon, Jesus, lifting His eyes to heaven, addressed His Father, not to make a request, but to thank Him that His request had been granted. Thereby He shows His fellowship with the Father, by whose word He quickeneth whom He will. Westcott explains it in this way:

This thanksgiving was not for any uncertain or unexpected gift. It was rather a proclamation of fellowship with God. The sympathy in work and thought between the Father and the Son is always perfect and uninterrupted, and now it was revealed in action. Even in this sorrow the Son knew the end; but that which He knew, others denied, and by the open claim to the co-operation of God, the Lord made a last solemn appeal to the belief of His adversaries.¹⁰⁹

After this our Savior "cried with a loud voice, Lazarus, come forth!" And he that was dead came forth, bound hand and foot with grave clothes, and his face was bound with a napkin. Jesus saith unto them: "Loose him, and let him go!" The effect of this stupendous miracle was two-fold. Some of those Jews who had come to visit and comfort Mary and Martha left the

¹⁰⁹ Taylor, Op. cit., p. 381.

place with the conviction that His words and miracles were true, that He was actually the Son of God, the Promised Messiah. Others, as was the case so often, refused to believe on Him even in the face of that wonderful work, and went to the Pharisees and told them what Jesus had done.¹¹⁰

Can this scene be regarded as a deliberate deception by Jesus, with or without the co-operation of His friends, as is suggested by Renan? Or can this account be considered merely as a piece of imaginative religious fiction? Surely, neither hypothesis is tenable; the one involves a moral monstrosity quite inconceivable, while the other is a moral miracle as inexplicable as the miracle itself.¹¹¹ According to Jewish custom, deep mourning for the dead lasted for seven days. Many people had come to the home of the sisters to comfort and console them. If Lazarus were not dead, it seems quite impossible to have concealed that fact from all those eyes. Furthermore, if there had been any deception at all connected with the miracle, eye-witnesses of it certainly would have raised much objection to the truthfulness of the account recorded by John. But no objection was raised. In fact, even His enemies, from whom we naturally would expect the accusation of fraud, are silent.

¹¹⁰ Fahling, Op. cit., p.489.

¹¹¹ Shafto, Op. cit., pp.172-173.

In the words: "I am the Resurrection and the Life", we find the lesson which our Lord wished to teach the bereaved sisters as well as His disciples. Martha, in her discussion with Jesus, shortly before His actual arrival in Bethany, had stated the resurrection rather as a doctrine, a current tenet: Jesus states it as a fact, identified with His own person. He does not say: "I raise the dead; I perform the resurrection, but I am the resurrection". "In His own person, representing humanity, He exhibits man as immortal, but immortal only through union with Him".¹¹² In the words, "the life", there is the larger and more inclusive idea. Resurrection is involved in life as an incident developed by the temporary and apparent triumph and victory of death. But all true life is in Christ. In Him we find all that is essential to life, in its origin, in its maintenance, and its consummation. All this is conveyed to the believer by his union with the Savior of all. Godet writes:

Every believer is in reality and forever sheltered from death. To die with full light, in the clear certainty of the life which is in Jesus, to die only to continue to live in Him, is no longer that fact which human language designates by the name of death. It is as though Jesus had said: In Me death is certain to live, and the living is certain never to die.¹¹³

112 Vincent, Op. cit., p. 203.

113 Quoted by Vincent, Op. cit., p. 203.

The raising of Lazarus differs from the Resurrection of Christ Himself because Lazarus, so far as we know, was not raised to a new and more glorious mode of existence, but merely restored to the sort of life he had before. The fitness of the miracle lies in the fact that He who will raise all men at the general resurrection here does it small and close, and in an inferior - a merely anticipatory - fashion. For the mere restoration of Lazarus is as inferior in splendor to the glorious resurrection of the new Humanity as stone jars are to the green and growing vine, or five little barley loaves to all the waving bronze and gold of a fat valley ripe for harvest.¹¹⁴

¹¹⁴ Lewis, Op. cit., p.180.

Conclusion.

The narratives of Christ's life show that an essential characteristic of His Gospel ministry was His possession and use of miraculous powers. His works, no less than His words, made a deep impression on His contemporaries. Both moved them to astonishment and questioning: "What is the wisdom that is given to this man, and what mean such mighty works wrought by His hands?" (Mk. 6, 2). Yet in spite of the wonder and amazement that the working of them caused, these deeds were normal to Jesus. They were part of the way in which He expressed Himself; the inevitable and natural outcome of His personality, irrepressible acts of love and kindness. He could not remain indifferent to the suffering needs of mankind. More than once do we come across the phrase which sums up His activity among men: "He went about doing good."

But Jesus rarely laid much stress on miracles, though on occasion He did appeal to them, as in the evidence He sent to John the Baptist, or, again, in the controversy about the forgiveness of sins (Mk. 2, 9-10), or in the last discourse: "Believe Me that I am in the Father, and the Father in Me: or else believe Me for the very works' sake (Jn. 14). He did not come as a worker of miracles primarily, but as a Teacher and Savior who sought to communicate to His hearers Himself, and so to reveal to them the Father. And the miracles were an essential part of that teaching.¹¹⁵

¹¹⁵ Shafto, Op. cit., pp. 181-182.

The teaching of Jesus whether by word or deed makes one demand on His listeners. He demands faith in Himself. Often He refused to satisfy the idle curiosities of on-lookers simply because He knew that it would do no good, that it would not lead them to faith and trust in Himself as their Savior and Redeemer. But by the miraculous happenings recorded in the Gospels, He wanted men to recognize that union with Him, trust in Him, would bring to them not only the physical blessings for temporal life, but also the spiritual blessings for a timeless eternity.

What is note-worthy about the miraculous action of Christ is what can be called miraculous moderation. This point is very ably set forth by Fairbairn in the words:

His abstention from the use of His power is even more remarkable than His exercise of it. Supernatural power is a dangerous thing to possess, an awful temptation. Few men could possess it without being depraved by its possession, without at least often using it unwisely. It is a power with which we should hardly trust any man...But the extraordinary fact stands: the people believed Christ to possess it, and yet trusted Him, and He justified their trust. He was never untimely, extravagant, or ungracious in the exercise of His supernatural gifts. They were never used on His own behalf. He had power above Nature, but He lived under the laws and within the limits she sets...He was often hungry and athirst, but He never fed Himself as He fed the multitudes on the hill-side, or refreshed Himself as He refreshed the wedding guests at Cana in Galilee. He suffered, knew heart-break, pain, and death; but He never asked any sovereign might to lighten His sorrows, heal His wounds, or roll back the ebbing tide of life. Then, too, His power is never exercised for defensive or hostile purposes. His enemies acknowledge His miracles, confessing that He had a power more than

human, but not the will to use it devilishly. His prayer on the cross explains and illustrates His conduct. What He asked His Father to do, He was always doing - exercising mercy, forgiving men who did not know the sinfulness of their doings. He was thus, in what He abstained from doing, a witness to the divine grace He incarnated. His sufferings and death were voluntary, results of His own choice. As He willed to heal men, so He willed to die for man. The motives that induced Him to work miracles moved Him to die; He exercised His power that He might save from suffering; He withheld it that He might save from sin...Here men have found the wonder of all ages - "God commending His love to us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us".¹¹⁶

What is the value of the miracle for us today? Orchard has summed it up very well in the words:

The value of belief in miracles is, first of all, that it saves us from the wholesale rejection of the story of Revelation; secondly, it keeps the human mind always open to higher possibilities beyond mechanical rigidity and illegitimate limitations; but thirdly, it makes us constantly dependent upon God; for according to the true definition of a miracle we can never ourselves expect to work miracles merely by the acquirement of greater knowledge or even greater saintliness, nor can we be certain that God will ever work a miracle in any given circumstance, however great we ourselves may think the need to be. All things are possible with God, but all things are not expedient for us; and thus while the belief in miracle opens the mind to the continual possibility of the direct intervention of God, yet it never allows us to calculate, dictate or presume. The belief in miracle is, therefore, an essential element in a truly religious interpretation of God's relations to man and the world. ¹¹⁷

¹¹⁶ Fairbairn, Op. cit., pp.161-162.

¹¹⁷ Orchard, Op. cit., pp.185-186.

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