HOW MIRACULOUS CAN WE CONSIDER JESUS TO HAVE BEEN?

DIFFERENT RESPONSES TO MIRACLE IN THE TRADITION OF INQUIRY

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A man does not sin when he thinks about the truths of faith without devotion, for topics can be considered merely theoretically and debated in cold blood.

St. Thomas Aquinas, Declaratio CVIII Dubiorum, 88, 89, in Theological Texts, selected and translated with Notes and an Introduction by Thomas Gilbey (London, New York and Toronto: Geoffrey Cumberlege, Oxford University Press, 1955), p. 200.

The most firmly believing Christian has within him the elements of criticism as a latent deposit of unbelief, or rather as a negative germ of knowledge, and only by its constant repression can he maintain the predominance of his faith, which is thus essentially a re-established faith.

D. F. Strauss, The Life of Jesus Critically Examined, translated by George Eliot from the Fourth German Edition, with an Introduction by Otto Pfleiderer (London: Swan Sonnenschein & Co.; New York: Macmillan & Co., 1898), p. 757.

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I dedicate this thesis to my father and mother.

DECLARATION

I declare that this thesis is entirely my own work, and contains no material which I have used in previous research or publications.

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SUMMARY

Accounts of miracles are found in the four Gospels, elsewhere in the New and Old Testaments, and at other times down to the present. Responses to the figure of Jesus among his Gospel miracles differ with the different judgements that are made about the possibility of there being miracles at all. As a matter of fact, our tradition of inquiry contains diverging, even opposing conclusions on this point, and this has a definite impact on the study of the Gospels and their central character.

This thesis constitutes a comprehensive response to the issue of miracle as it affects the interpretation of the Gospels, and hence, what we are able to believe about Jesus and the extent of his miraculous activity. Having outlined the divided response to miracle (Chapter One), the thesis is built up by studies of six principal respondents to the issue of miracle.

On the one hand, we have chosen St. Thomas Aquinas, Cardinal Newman and C. S. Lewis to represent the 'maximal' depiction of belief in miracle. These three studies exhibit the interpretations of the Gospels that accompany, and in part depend on, the non-problematical acceptance of miracle. On the other hand, we have chosen David Hume, D. F. Strauss and Rudolf Bultmann to represent the 'minimalistic' position on miracle. While Hume does not formally discuss the Gospel miracles, his conclusions are plainly relevant, and in the two latter studies, close attention is paid to the actual interpretation of Gospel miracle stories.

In all the studies, wherever possible, I have tried to concentrate on what in particular they believed about Jesus in his miracles. In effect, this has meant pursuing a miracle-structure from conception through to Ascension. In discovering what has been believed about Jesus in his miracles, we have often placed the emphasis on the interpreters' response to a Gospel or Gospel passage. In the concluding chapter, I direct my own attention to St. Mark's Gospel and, in the light of earlier chapters, put my own questions to it.

While interesting results emerge from the studies of the six interpreters, my principal conclusion is that there are good reasons not to identify the Jesus of the Gospel miracles with Jesus in his pragmatic existence. While it remains coherent to develop an apology or world-view in which literal miracles on the greatest scale have a place in nature and history, it is their very magnitude that raises the decisive objections to locating them as events in Jesus' mundane existence, prior to the Resurrection.

INTRODUCTION

The research programme, of which this thesis is a concrete result, developed from my dissatisfaction with responses to the issue of miracle; in particular, to the specific subject of the Gospel figure of Jesus and his miracles. This thesis has taken the form of a comprehensive account of how, even when beginning with a conservative theological outlook, the inquirer will reach the decision not to equate Jesus in his Gospel miracles with a figure in pragmatic history.

The method of conducting the inquiry has enabled me to hold together a number of factors that are often treated separately. Miracle is often encountered as a purely philosophical problem in which theist and empiricist-sceptic argue about whether there can be such a thing, whether it is primitive and outmoded to believe in them, or whether they are axiomatically impossible. From another perspective, and often in another setting altogether, one encounters the Gospels with their apparent intention to announce that Jesus, as a matter of fact, did these particular miracles. Here, the mode of encounter is not one of cautious argument, but of a presentation of wonders believed to have happened - or so it seems. Yet in attending to sermons, or commentaries on these Gospels, the problematic state of response to miracle is quickly seen. Many interpreters are far from comfortable with them, and by the end of their comments, have left the reader with little of the miracle intact. The miraculous element in the subject matter is scarcely valued. Even here, a number of factors are involved which warrant inclusion in a comprehensive response. Sometimes, the denial of historicity is taken as an effective de-valuing of the account. On the other hand, the elimination of historicity is sometimes taken as the necessary preliminary to bringing out the real point or value of the story. Often, in these responses, it is felt that the interpreter has appealed to his background beliefs about miracle, beliefs which he will often decline to discuss within the parameters of his commentary. I have, however, often wanted to ask whether the subject matter being interpreted ought itself to have a formative

influence, even a determinative influence on these background beliefs of the commentator. Sometimes it is suggested that the question of occurrence, 'Did Jesus do this?' is of no significance to-day, and that it is theologically gauche even to ask. Further objections to miracles take the form of appeals to issues internal to the Gospels themselves. At the simplest level, a conservative can cope with the restoration of Malchus' ear being overlooked by all Evangelists save one, but even at this basic level the unfortunate fig tree cannot both have withered on the spot and more gradually overnight. As we see, though, the internal-to-Gospel issues are far more complex than this. These, then, are some of the often disparate matters that I have tried to hold together in one comprehensive response to issues raised by miracle.

I believe that I have succeeded in holding potentially disparate areas of inquiry together within the limits of this thesis. I have proceeded by focussing on the particular, theological and interpretative activity of six significant figures in the tradition of response to miracle. Hence, I have built up a composite picture of what in particular has been believed about miracle, and about Jesus in his Gospel miracles. The unity achieved for the sub-issues of the inquiry is thus the realistic unity of these individuals' systematic responses, with a focus in what they believed. In this way, I hope to have covered basic issues for any contemporary attempt to recover beliefs about Jesus and his literal miracles. Interest in their broader principles of interpretation, their background beliefs about God and the world, even their biographical-historical circumstances, has been subordinated to the more-than-sufficien task of closely attending to what in particular they believed about Jesus among his miracles. At the same time, many of these sub-issues have been made accessible, and less obscure.

I adopted this method of proceeding because it seemed to me to provide the best way of assessing the credibility of particular miracles, without grinding to a halt at that point where pre-suppositions or axiomatic outlooks are appealed to. Here, we find first principles of inquiry in operation, not in static isolation, and we assess them in conjunction with what has been believed. We do this across the range of beliefs exhibited in the works of St. Thomas Aquinas, Cardinal Newman, C. S. Lewis, David Hume, D. F. Strauss and Rudolf Bultmann.

A further focus, even a 'litmus test' has been provided

by devoting one chapter to specific issues raised by Mark's Gospel. I have, where appropriate, tried to refer the theologians' interpretations to Markan pericopes, but more importantly, have tried to consider issues raised by Mark itself for any attempt to believe that Jesus' miracles therein were events in pragmatic history.

Some of the specific beliefs of the apologists chosen to represent the conservative or orthodox tradition have not been without their shocks, and have made a distinctive contribution to this student's final conclusions, and decision that there are good reasons to limit the extent of Jesus' miracles prior to the Resurrection. It will help the readers of this thesis to know that I began my research with the belief that if interpreters would question their own pre-suppositions and approach the Gospels with a particular set of beliefs about God and His power and freedom, then, almost automatically, a conservative understanding of Jesus among his miracles would emerge. In this thesis, we see the shortfalls of this approach, and, hopefully, something of a more durable revision.

Amongst many particular points, three remain most significant. The first is the recovery of what St. Thomas Aquinas believed about Jesus and his miracles. While there are a number of places where his conclusions might startle a modern conservative, I was particularly moved by his account of the three hours' darkness while Jesus hung on the cross, and the five-fold moon miracle that accounted for it. This belief, which I have never come across in any commentary or even heard referred to before, has been one of the chief factors in causing me seriously to re-think the issues raised by belief in miracles. In the second place, I believe it is important to stress just how conservative Newman's final resolution of the question of Biblical miracles really was, despite the apparent likelihood of a radical critique emerging at some places. Though it is not my specific subject here, this should be of some significance to those who look to his determinative influence on the modern Catholic and Anglican churches. Finally, I was constantly struck by the extent to which so much of modern interpretation of Gospel miracles is pre-figured, if not contained in D. F. Strauss' 1835 achievement, Leben Jesu. I would like to think that I have covered the issues in a way that would have emerged, were the individuals concerned able to be brought together for a systematic discussion of the subject.

CHAPTER I

DIVERGENT RESPONSES TO MIRACLE

AN INITIAL ENCOUNTER

Possible and Impossible

World-views

Accounts of miracles raise peculiar problems. They challenge our deepest beliefs about what is possible and what is impossible, about the kinds of event that can occur in our world. We find that the same miracle account can evoke opposing responses or evaluations. What enables one respondent to maintain that the account refers to an event that is possible and may in fact have taken place, while a second respondent begins with the certitude that the event in question could never happen? For the second respondent, the testifier's or narrator's intention to tell of a miracle that took place, is met by the basic certainty that this kind of event is impossible under all circumstances.

The oddity of the miracle in question, and the inquirer's beliefs about what is possible, may combine to classify the account in a way that modifies and minimizes any historical intention in it. Barnabas Lindars writes,

> Miracles are sometimes ascribed to such holy men without any kind of declaration concerning God and his power and his purposes for men. They simply testify to the peculiar power or virtue which belongs to a man of God, and take the form of incidents common to hagiography all down the ages. There is an excellent example of this sort of thing in the Elisha cycle. In 2 Kings 13:20-21, we read how a dead man revived through contact with the bones of Elisha. Christian hagiography is full of comparable stories of the potency of relics. They denote a superstitious attitude devoid of the theological awareness which is so clearly marked in the Bible as a whole. They simply attest the wonder that surrounds a holy man in popular memory, and invite the critic to classify them as folk-lore.[1]

The tradition of inquiry into miracle clearly exhibits a central division over the question of whether the accounts, reports, testimonies or stories are about possible or impossible occurrences.

As the same account is met by antithetical responses at this point, an evaluation of the possibility/impossibility division must respond to the wider or surrounding factors that contribute to these different judgements being made. A convenient term is often used to cover these surrounding or contextual factors: - Weltanschauung or 'world-view'. As Richard Swinburne indicates, it is differences at this level of the inquiry that strongly influence particular judgements, even though the events in question can have some influence on the Weltanschauungen.

> With one Weltanschauung ('world-view') one rightly does not ask much in the way of detailed historical evidence for a miracle since miracles are the kind of events which one expects to occur in many or certain specific circumstances. The testimony of one witness to an occurrence of the kind of miracle which in its occurrence one would expect to happen should be sufficient to carry conviction, just as we accept the testimony of one witness to a claim that when he let go of a book which he was holding it fell to the ground. With another Weltanschauung one rightly asks for a large amount of historical evidence, because of one's general conviction that the world is a certain kind of world, a world without a god and so a world in which miracles do not happen. Which Weltanschauung is right is a matter for long argument . . . What we have been assessing in this study is the value of the historical and scientific evidence about particular alleged miracles to the claim that a miracle has occurred, against the background of the different Weltanschauungen. As we have seen, such particular historical and scientific evidence makes its small contribution to supporting or opposing the different Weltanschauungen.[2]

In turning to the miracles attributed to Jesus in the Gospels, we will, it seems, be confronted by these 'long arguments' about competing world-views if we wish to reach the best conclusion about the possible historicity of the deeds recounted there. We could begin by accepting one outlook as axiomatic and proceed to give a systematic account of the miracle stories based on it. But, given that the tradition of interpretation contains this basic division, someone beginning an inquiry into the miracles of the Gospels and not compelled by a particular outlook, will want to know which world-view to adopt, and whether, for example, he should keep even an open mind about someone walking on water. For those to whom this is simply, axiomatically impossible, such an approach may appear anarchic, fundamentalistically conservative, or naïvely open-minded.

For some inquirers into miracle, the question of world-view is significant, but is not a matter in which we to-day exercise any real freedom. The world-view that excludes the literally

miraculous is part of the 'given' of our modern world, which cannot be tampered with or replaced by any revival of an outlook in which wonders are a real possibility. Rudolf Bultmann writes,

> For the world-view of the Scripture is mythological and is therefore unacceptable to modern man whose thinking has been shaped by science and is therefore no longer mythological. Modern man always makes use of technical means which are the result of science. . . . Nobody reckons with direct intervention by transcendent powers. . . . The main point, however, is not the concrete results of scientific research and the contents of a world-view, but the method of thinking from which world-views follow. For example, it makes no difference in principle whether the earth rotates round the sun or the sun rotates round the earth, but it does make a decisive difference that modern man understands the motion of the universe as a motion which obeys a cosmic law, a law of nature which human reason can discover. Therefore, modern man acknowledges as reality only such phenomena or events as are comprehensible within the framework of the rational order of the universe. He does not acknowledge miracles because they do not fit into this lawful order. When a strange or marvellous accident occurs, he does not rest until he has found a rational cause.[3]

In another place he writes,

> The only relevant question for the theologian is the basic assumption on which the adoption of a biological as of every other Weltanschauung rests, and that assumption is the view of the world which has been moulded by modern science and the modern conception of human nature as a self-subsistent unity immune from the interference of supernatural powers.[4]

This rejection of the possibility of there being miracles is so basic for Bultmann, that attempts to construct a world-view in which their potential reality is maintained, perhaps by adhering to a particular concept of God, can in fact betray the reality of belief in God and 'escape from the reality of my existence'.[5] It might amount to a survival or revival of 'primitive thinking and superstition'.[6]

Yet some theists remain unabashed, and continue to try to set-out the conditions whereby miracles, and specifically the Gospel miracles, would make sense as literal events. Hugo Meynell attempts to provide an outline of theistic belief for which the occurrence of a significant number of Jesus' miracles remains important.

> The question of the historicity of the miracle-stories in the Gospels is thus entwined in the larger question of what is at stake in Christian belief - whether it is exclusively the experience of new life or 'authentic existence' here and now, or whether it is also, and even more centrally, beliefs about the past and future which cannot be exclusively verified in present experience. Thus the question of whether the miracles actually

> happened or did not happen cannot be set aside as of no real moment to the Christian theist.[7]

Reminiscent of Swinburne's reference to long arguments about world-views, he adds, 'There are many apparent short cuts to answering this question, none of them satisfactory.'[8] Whereas Bultmann is dismissive of attempts to recover the literally miraculous, Meynell refers to standards of objectivity that would limit the value of the findings and beliefs of theists who, amongst other things, no longer accommodate historical miracles.

> Of course there are many theists who do not believe in the occurrence of miracles as vindicating and illustrating God's revelation of himself, either now or in the past; but such theists ought to consider that the less difference belief in God is deemed to make to expectations about matters of fact, the more colourable is the allegation that it is a mere picture of life, aesthetically useful to some, but with no claim to objective validity.[9]

Setting out what is at stake in particular conclusions, and indeed, particular first principles of inquiry into miracle, is not, as Meynell has indicated, to reach the best interpretation of the miracles in the Gospels, but forms only part of the inquiry. The detailed work on the texts in question remains to be done, and to this extent, Meynell's work is a preliminary study that attempts to show that it is at least coherent, that it makes sense, to believe that these events could have taken place.

> I have tried to show that arguments to the effect that Christian belief, as so conceived, is incoherent, are ill-founded. The question of its truth or falsity is a different matter; though I have not purported to resolve it, I have suggested the way in which historical evidence might converge in future in such a way as to put the matter beyond all reasonable doubt.[10]

However, what we do not find in the chapter that he devotes to miracle is any attempt to respond to them in the context of a complete Gospel, which might itself raise issues about the intelligibility of belief in the occurrence of these events. He considers grouping and classifications of the miracles, different responses to the question of whether these kinds of event could happen, and a Christian emphasis on Jesus' death and Resurrection as the '"Word of God" par excellence.' But we do not find an attempt to make sense of a Gospel as an internally consistent narrative in which miracle plays an historically conceivable part from beginning to end. Nor in this respect does he address or even identify any tension internal to a Gospel between the miracles

as events in Jesus' life, and the Resurrection as the goal towards which that life irresistibly moves. As we shall discover, this tension between miracle and Resurrection is quite significant, particularly in Mark.

Some magnifications of Jesus' identity that are intended to make even the greatest miracles his fitting activity, generate further problems for belief in historicity. As Bultmann has pointed out,

> If the Christ who died such a death was the pre-existent Son of God, what could death mean for him? Obviously very little, if he knew that he would rise again in three days! [11]

According to Wolfhart Pannenberg, when dogmatic Christology adopts this theological datum as fact, it 'bypasses the real depth of meaning of Jesus' crucifixion and resurrection',[12] and overlooks the catastrophe that the cross must have signified for Jesus and his disciples. The simple point that I am making at this stage is, that to establish the coherence of belief in the occurrence of literal miracles has a limited part to play in any interpretation of the Gospels, and, that some accommodations of the miraculous generate significant difficulties for this belief. Furthermore, it may turn out that miracles and the Resurrection, while having something of the wonderful in common, do not in fact function in the same way in an interpretation of the Gospels that is attentive to the internal flow of events, or narrative story-line. The limitations of consistent outlooks, in which miracles have a central place as literal events, are most clearly illustrated by C. S. Lewis' work, Miracles, A Preliminary Study.

Miracles

An initial acquaintance with the tradition of inquiry into Jesus' miracles reveals that totally different conclusions have been reached about their occurrence. Furthermore, one cannot simply apportion the different results into different centuries, ages, or epochs of inquiry, and use the modern/ancient distinction as an evaluative epithet. But we can begin with references to Locke's acceptance of Jesus' miracles, in The Reasonableness of Christianity (1695). He wrote,

> The evidence of Our Savior's mission from heaven is so great, in the multitude of miracles he did, before all sorts of people, that what he delivered cannot but be received as the oracles of God, and unquestionable verity. For the miracles he did were so ordered by the divine providence and wisdom, that they never were, nor could be denied by any of the enemies or opposers of Christianity.[13]

Locke concluded that Jesus' miracles were didactically appropriate for conveying the truths of religion to minds unaccustomed to lines of abstract argument from first principles. Any sense of their oddity is softened by this function that they have.

> And I ask, whether one coming from heaven in the power of God, in full and clear evidence and demonstration of miracles, giving plain and direct rules of morality and obedience, be not likelier to enlighten the bulk of mankind and set them right in their duties, and bring them to do them, than by reasoning with them from general notions and principles of human reason?[14]

The miracles are hardly seen as ends in themselves, and they become rather subservient to the religious truths that they are said to promote.

> The healing of the sick, the restoring of sight to the blind by a word, the raising and being raised from the dead, are matters of fact, which they can without difficulty conceive; and that he who does such things, must do them by the assistance of a divine power. These things lie level to the ordinariest apprehension; he that can distinguish between sick and well, lame and sound, dead and alive, is capable of this doctrine. To one who is once persuaded that Jesus Christ was sent by God to be a King, and a Saviour of those who do believe in him, all his commands become principles; there needs no other proof for the truth of what he says, but that he said it: and there needs no more but to read the inspired books to be instructed.[15]

In A Discourse of Miracles (written 1702, published posthumously 1706), Locke was able to accommodate the miracles of Jesus in a most straightforward manner.

> If we will direct our thoughts by what has been, we must conclude that miracles, as the credentials of a messenger delivering a divine religion, have no place but upon a supposition of one only true God . . . so that the only revelations that come attested by miracles, being only those of Moses and Christ, and they confirming each other, the business of miracles, as it stands really in matter of fact, has no manner of difficulty in it; and I think the most scrupulous or sceptical cannot from miracles raise the least doubt against the divine revelation of the gospel.[16]

The connection between Locke, who accepted the occurrence of Jesus' miracles and Hume, who, circumspectly,[17] did not, is a subject to which we shall return. The point remains that as astute a thinker as Locke is not at all troubled by belief in the occurrence of Jesus' miracles. One finds the same acceptance of their occurrence to-day. C. E. B. Cranfield writes,

> Since . . . we have good reason to suppose that the gospel tradition is derived from honest and not unintelligent people, and since there is - for the most part at any rate - a notable reserve about the miracles ascribed to Jesus

> (contrast the apocryphal gospels!), which would hardly be compatible with the whole classes of Jesus' miracles being an invention, it does not seem unreasonable to believe that miracles of all four classes occurred.[18]

The four classes are exorcisms, healings, raisings of the dead and nature miracles. Cranfield observes that as nature miracles and raisings from the dead were attributed to Old Testament figures, 'these things could not be to Jews of the first century compelling proofs of divinity, but at the most proofs of prophetic status.'[19] As we shall see in the discussion of Aquinas, this point may turn upon the issue of who is referred to as possessing the power to effect the miracle; in what sense it belongs to the man in question, and in what sense to God. Though Cranfield does not discuss the issue here, it needs to be examined to evaluate his claim, 'If the historicity of any Old Testament nature miracles be granted, then those of Jesus do not lift him above <u>human</u> conditions.'[20] I certainly find it difficult to conceive of anyone within the limits of human conditions being responsible for multiplying bread and fish. Of the first feeding account, Cranfield concludes, 'We take it that the incident was a miracle.'[21]

H. Van der Loos, in his seven hundred page work on Jesus' miracles, has little difficulty in responding to them as literal events.

> Whoever believes that the God of Israel sent His Son Jesus Christ the Lord and Saviour of the world, will, on the grounds of this belief and profession understand and interpret the miracles of the New Testament in a certain way. It is the 'credo' which, theologically speaking, gives the concept of miracle its final form and content. As such, therefore, miracle may well be called 'the child of Faith'.[22]

Following a more extensive outline of aspects of his definition of miracle, and his avowal that this correctly describes the reality of specific miracles, he concludes,

> A miracle is a direct act of God in which He reveals to mankind, with an intention, a new observable reality, which can only be fully understood by faith. In this new reality God proclaims, outside and against the known laws of order and regularity in nature, His freedom, power and love.[23]

Having established to his satisfaction that miracles are possible, he can then maintain that arguments about the <u>apparent</u> impossibility of the event, cannot be brought to bear in the critical discussion of the origin and significance of the account in its present setting. One must always be alive to the likelihood

that Jesus really did the miracle, while allowing that the Evangelist may be presenting it with his own emphasis. On the Cana wine miracle he writes,

> As regards the objection to the event as such, the fact itself, we believe that this may be regarded as unfounded. In other words it may not be questioned whether Jesus could or could not have performed such a feat. Anyone who doubts the wine miracle because it appears so impossible must bear in mind that such an objection can be made to all other miracles. The fact itself, viz. the changing of water into wine, cannot therefore be taken into account or used as a criterion in judging this miracle.[24]

The fact itself, that it is precisely a miracle, does of course figure in the motivation to account for the narrative in some other way. However, it is not the only factor in the quest for re-interpretation. But at the heart of inquiry into the miracles, Van der Loos places the simple alternative, 'At the highest stage of thought on this matter one is faced with the alternative: to believe that Jesus performed feats <u>supra et contra naturam</u> or not to believe it.'[25] As he indicates, this either/or situation is never simply arbitrary, but informed by further factors that make one choice more reasonable than the other.

Some traditional apologetic for miracles depends upon the belief that there is an analogous relationship between the human will and the Divine will. The point of the apology is to show that nature in its fixed capacities and law-like regularity can 'digest' events that are <u>above</u>, <u>contrary to</u>, or <u>outside</u> the range of its capacities. The argument begins by referring to the human will, in acts of the complete person, counteracting natural forces, with no detriment to laws or to nature itself. God, it seems, is free to exercise His will on the things of creation, and His possession of sufficient power and an appropriate manner of acting, means that in some miracles, all that is in fact happening, as far as nature's laws are concerned, is that the power to change things is coming from a different source. The laws governing the situation are affected no differently, or impinged upon in no more drastic manner than if man had acted. The point is not to establish that God used identical means, but that the prerogatives of law are not infringed.

> Man controls nature, nay, can live only by the counteraction of natural forces. Though all this goes on around us, we never speak of natural forces violated. These forces are still working after their kind, and no force is destroyed, nor is any law broken, nor does confusion result. The introduction of human will may bring about a displacement of the physical forces, but no infraction of physical processes.

> Now in a miracle God's action relative to its bearing on natural forces is analogous to the action of human personality. Thus, e.g., it is against the nature of iron to float, but the action of Eliseus in raising the axe-head to the surface of the water (IV Kings, vi) is no more a violation, or a transgression, or an infraction, of natural laws than if he raised it with his hand. Again, it is of the nature of fire to burn, but when, e.g., the Three Children were preserved untouched in the fiery furnace (Dan., iii) there was nothing unnatural in the act, as these writers use the word, any more than there would be in erecting a dwelling absolutely fire-proof. In the one case, as in the other, there was no paralysis of natural forces and no consequent disorder.[26]

We must keep in mind that the author is not in fact offering a curious kind of natural explanation for these events: that there was nothing miraculous or beyond natural capacities operating because in the former case an 'invisible hand' did the lifting, and in the latter, they were wearing 'invisible fire-suits'. The point being made is confined to the response of law-like nature to personal agencies in their appropriate degree of power - we are not given a curious 'mechanics' for the events.

> Thus a boy, by throwing a stone into the air, does not disarrange the order of nature or do away with the law of gravity. A new force only is brought in and counteracts the tendencies of the natural forces . . . The analogy from man's act to God's act is complete as far as concerns a break in the uniformity of nature or a violation of its laws. The extent of the power exerted does not affect the point at issue.[27]

Bearing in mind that Elisha is said to raise the axehead, the miracle, the really unusual thing, would lie in this man being enabled to do what was beyond the capacity of a man, not that there was a sufficient power to raise the axe. For as Athanasius wrote in the fourth century,

> A man cannot transport things from one place to another, for instance, merely by thinking about them; nor can you or I move the sun and the stars just by sitting at home and looking at them.[28]

While there is a clear sense in which the writer of the Encyclopaedia article wants to maintain that the miracle gives no offence to the realm and reality of nature's laws, the sense of departure from what is natural is not diminished. The event remains a miracle, not a curious natural occurrence. Both Strauss (1835) and Feuerbach (1841) objected to accounts of miracle that did not make the distinction between natural and miraculous change clear enough. Strauss had the apologetic of Olshausen in mind, who wrote of the Cana wine miracle,

> Hence the Fathers justly observe that here nothing else occurred than what is annually displayed in a more gradual

development in the vine. . . . The essence of the miracle consists in divinely effecting the acceleration of the natural process.[29]

It is incontrovertible that the wine was 'produced' quickly. But it is highly doubtful that there was any natural process to be accelerated. If your initial 'ingredient' was water in a pot, it is very difficult to make sense of any reference to 'accelerating' this to form wine. As such, there simply is nothing to 'speed-up', and the value of an apology is diminished if the vast differences between nature and miracle are not stressed. As Van der Loos writes,

> We can only speak of a miracle when an event occurs outside and against the known order of nature. This event must not be open to any natural explanation whatsoever, and it must also never be capable of explanation in any natural way whatsoever.[30]

From a different perspective, James Barr makes a similar observation when he writes,

> Conservatives seem not to have seen a point that to most Christians must be sufficiently obvious: the problem of miracle cannot be solved simply by saying that anything can happen, or even that anything can happen so long as it is in the Bible, because if anything can happen, no happening will be a miracle. Far from it being a necessity of Christian faith that one accepts as true the story of any miracle narrated, the miraculous character of occurrences is preserved only if miracles are regarded as in a high degree improbable if not impossible. Only when miracles cannot happen do we have reason to wonder at them when they come to pass.[31]

No Miracles, Qualified Miracles

It is easy to compile examples of interpretative responses to miracle accounts that diminish or altogether revalue their apparent intention to refer to something that happened. Here, we form an initial outline of some of these responses to Jesus' miracles.

Some interpreters, as mentioned in the earlier references to world-views, work with the presupposition or axiom of inquiry that miracle as such is impossible. Again, Bultmann writes,

> In fact, however, a miracle in the sense of an action of God cannot be thought of as an event which happens on the level of secular (worldly) events. It is not visible, not capable of objective, scientific proof which is possible only within an objective view of the world.[32]

One would be mistaken in principle even to consider that the axe-head could be made to float by the operation of God's sufficient power. Turning to a somewhat more important miracle, we find Hans Küng's re-appraisal of the miraculous conception of Jesus.

> Although the virgin birth cannot be understood as a historical-biological event, it can be regarded as a meaningful symbol at least for that time. It would symbolize the fact that, with Jesus who surpasses and closes the Old Covenant, God has made a truly new beginning . . . admittedly, even then, a sign liable to be misunderstood . . . this new beginning then can be proclaimed to-day without the aid of the legend of a virgin birth, which is more than ever liable to be misunderstood in modern times. No one can be obliged to believe in the biological fact of a virginal conception or birth. . . .
>
> For public reading in church the story obviously does not need to be omitted. But, recalling what was said about the necessity and limits of demythologizing, it should be honestly and discriminatingly interpreted.[33]

His re-appraisal extends to the miracles attributed to Jesus himself. He writes of Jesus' walking on the water,

> Critical minds will scarcely be helped by those theologians who perhaps even to-day, while not asserting in a fundamentalist spirit that the historicity of the miracle accounts is a matter of faith, think that they can prove this apologetically in every individual case. The time must really be gone forever when quite a few thought they could demonstrate the possibility even of Christ's walking on the lake.[34]

One easily senses that the drive and direction in his inquiry is right away from the tradition in which the occurrence of Jesus' miracles was maintained in all seriousness as a fact of great significance.

> For some people, even to-day, none of this creates any problem. In all churches, there are devout people to whom Jesus means so much and the world picture of science and technology and all historical difficulties so little that they have no inhibitions about accepting all miracles literally as having happened exactly as they are described. Such readers may pass over the following pages and go on to the next chapter.[35]

Turning to a recent commentary on the Gospel of Matthew, we find F. W. Beare writing of the feeding miracles,

> A story like this is difficult for the modern reader to understand. It is of course preposterous if it be taken literally, as an account of an actual event. But if we are not capable of believing that several thousand people were fed with five loaves of bread and two fish, is it even worth looking for any kind of significance in the story at all?[36]

And though he outlines a number of responses to the miraculous feeding, one senses that his implicit answer to this question is 'No'. This opinion is confirmed by what we find in an earlier work, <u>The Earliest Records of Jesus</u>.

> He must also consider the whole question of the nature of the materials, the time and circumstances of those who transmitted the tradition, and the impossibility of imagining men in the first century telling the story of Jesus without miracles. He will be entirely justified in concluding that the Church's faith in Jesus does not depend in the slightest on the credibility of the stories which were told of him in the first generation of Christian believers.[37]

To this end, of walking on the water, he writes, 'The basic story

is equally a vehicle of instruction, not in any degree an account of an actual occurrence'.[38] Of the withering of the fig tree, he writes,

> This is the only cursing miracle in the Gospels. It will not be supposed that it is a report of an actual incident. The strange thing is that it should have found a place in the Gospels of Mark and Matthew - it is so out of keeping with everything else in their portrait of Jesus.[39]

When understood in this way, no matter what significance one finds in the miracle stories, an element of the fictitious will remain in the accounts of Jesus as one who walked on the sea and withered a tree. Early this century, Wilhelm Bousset described the process by which Jesus came to appear among these greater wonders:

> Instead, the fabrication of miracles in the life of Jesus probably took place as such a procedure usually takes place. People transferred to Jesus all sorts of stories which were current about this or that wonder worker and decorated gospel narratives that were already at hand with current miraculous motifs. . . .
>
> Thus did the community of Jesus' disciples fictionalize and surround the picture of Jesus with the glitter of the miraculous. Or, otherwise expressed, the personal image of Jesus begins to work with magnetic power and to draw to itself all possible materials and narratives which were at hand in his environment.[40]

Martin Dibelius responds to Jesus' miracles in a similar manner. For example, of the turning of water into wine, he writes,

> In this reconstruction there was preserved more or less fragmentarily a narrative which originally told of a divine, or half-divine miracle-doer, and of a wine-miracle characteristic of his epiphany: we may think of Dionysius or some similar god. This story would be transferred to Jesus, and thus would arise a Jesus Tale which the Evangelist edited and made to serve his ideas.[41]

R. M. Grant reaches a general conclusion about the Gospel miracle stories that includes an evaluation of the minds that could have formed and maintained them with any kind of historical intention.

> From one point of view the first centuries of our era represent the triumph of superstition. From another, they mark the discovery of passionate subjectivity. In the first sense, the miracles are examples of self deception. In the second, they are myths which express the Christian's freedom from the world of nature, from fate, from destiny, from any chain of natural causation.[42]

Though at their core the miracle stories are myths, Grant maintains that from an early date, Christian interpreters of the stories rationalized their mythology and took it to be about things and events that could be seen and encountered.

> We should claim that Christians were able to attain a more comprehensive understanding of human nature because of the

central place which they gave their mythology, and that they were better able to defend human freedom on their theological grounds.

On the other hand, we must admit that the Church fathers in general were too much under the spell of Greek rationalism to be able to avoid rationalizing their own myths. They had to treat the miracles of faith as if they were events subject to sense-perception. Perhaps their treatment was in part due to pressure from the non-philosophical simpliciores. In any case, by such misplaced concretion they lost the values they were trying to defend.[43]

Grant concludes that the miracles are more correctly approached as 'symbols, stories conveying pictures of the freedom and power of God', and though they 'transmitted their power to the believer by freeing him from slavery to his environment and from slavery to "fact"', this remained strictly correct only at the level of faith and imagination, not at the level of science and reason.[44]

We can, however, be certain that if miracles occurred, then a great proportion of the event would be subject to sense-perception. In the feeding miracles, for example, one would presume that the disciples would see the minimal quantities of food, would handle the vast quantities resulting, and in between, would see something very strange indeed. It seems then that the prior issue is always in the question, 'Are miracles like this possible?'. For, if they are, then it would not be a rationalizing of any myth to claim that they were subject to sense perception, but an accurate statement about the observable dimension of miracles - as Van der Loos has maintained. To raise this as a serious possibility somewhat undermines the force of the following claim.

> So far theology has avoided coming to grips with historical criticism by accusing it of adopting arbitrary presuppositions that are therefore in need of revision. Once it has been recognized that the method of historical criticism has its roots in the structure of human perception and epistemology, then only, a theology that allies itself to historical criticism will be able to have an ecumenical future.[45]

The sense of physical impossibility is only one of the objections brought against literal miracles. In addition, some interpreters find them theologically objectionable because of the idea of God that they convey. John Macquarrie writes,

> If miracle in the sense of supernatural intervention is irreconcilable with science and history, it is also objectionable theologically. It is objectionable because it goes back to a mythological outlook and expects God to manifest himself and prove himself in some extraordinary sensible phenomena. While the early Christian writers used many arguments to establish the claims of their faith, and

> some of these arguments seem strange to us, most of these writers wisely avoided putting too much weight on any appeal to miracles reportedly done by Jesus. In this, they were following his own teaching and example . . . what is distinctive about miracle is God's presence and self-manifestation in the event. The mythological way of thinking tried to express this distinctiveness by making the event itself something magical or supernatural, divorced from the natural sequence of events; but in doing this it shifted attention away from the essence of miracle (the divine presence and self-manifestation) to the discredited and mistaken idea of miracle as a magical sign. Actually if we look at stories of miracles and see how these stories have developed, we can sometimes see how some natural event which was indeed a miracle, a vehicle for God's action, gets transformed into a supernatural event as the story is embroidered by legends. The inflation of the natural event into the spectacular sign is the way by which the mythological mentality seeks to express the distinctiveness and significance of the event for religious faith. But God's acting or his presence cannot be proved by publicly observable events, and the attempt to transform the miracle into a public prodigy ends up by obscuring and discrediting the genuine miracle, understood as a revelatory event.[46]

For myself, I feel no initial obligation to accept it as a rule or law that 'God's acting or his presence cannot be proved by publicly observable events'. I would always want to ask about the particular public, and indeed, about what it was that they were said to have observed, and what effect it had on them. In as much as Macquarrie means something like, Faith can never be reduced to a simple base in perceptual events, there is no argument with him. It is the further claim, that special, observable events cannot establish the reality of God's action and presence, nor give specific form to faith, that remains open for discussion.

Some obstacles to the belief that a Gospel miracle occurred, may not be to do with the event's 'degree of difficulty', nor with the notion of God's power and action that it utilizes. Some issues are grounded within the Gospels themselves and call for a response both from those who admit and those who re-interpret the miracles. C. K. Barrett writes of the raising of Lazarus,

> What is the historical value of the story? This question depends mainly on the view taken of the sources and purposes of the Gospel. It is of course possible to take an a priori view of miracle which rules out the possibility of such an event as this. If such an a priori view is taken there is clearly no further room for argument, and it is not within the province of this commentary to discuss the philosophical aspect of miracle. If a priori opinions, whether negative or positive, be set aside, the chief argument against the historicity of the incident appears to be that there is no place for it in the Synoptic tradition.[47]

In other places, we find that Barrett gives an estimation of the difference between Jesus as he was and as he came to be presented in the Gospels. This would include significant differences in the miracles really done by him.

> Because the tradition was a genuine historical tradition, dealing with the real life of Jesus in his Jewish environment, it was necessary to argue the place of Jesus in Judaism. Thus the historical tradition was obliged to go beyond history, sometimes even to falsify history, precisely because it was historical. This fact constitutes the problem of the historical Jesus; at the same time it constitutes the only solution of the problem we are likely to find.[48]

William Barclay provides a clear example of revaluing any historical element in the account of the raising of Lazarus.

> It is clear that we must take the whole story in a spiritual sense. Surely what is meant is something like this. Lazarus had committed some terrible sin, a sin which had brought the home at Bethany a grief like the grief for death, a sin which he would never have committed, if Jesus had been present, a sin which had made his name stink in the nostrils of men, a sin which had broken the hearts of his sisters, a sin which had left him spiritually dead, and even unable to repent. Then comes Jesus - and all is healed and all is changed . . . once again Jesus had shown himself the friend of sinners . . . surely this is the supreme conversion story of the New Testament.[49]

But is this interpretation of the account not the supreme example of the conversion of a miracle story into something else? This example is typical of the response to miracle that we find throughout Barclay's work. The recent work by H. J. Richards is a more sophisticated re-iteration of themes found in Barclay. Barclay could write,

> John tells us, not of things that Jesus once did in Palestine, but of things that Jesus still does to-day. And what John wants us to see here is not that Jesus once one day turned some water pots of water into wine; he wants us to see that whenever Jesus comes into life, there comes a new quality which is like turning water into wine. . . . Without Jesus life is drab and uninteresting. With Jesus life is thrilling and wonderful and exhilarating.[50]

We find Richards writing,

> A gospel is not a biography of someone who lives in the past. It is a proclamation of faith in someone who lives on to-day. . . . The miracle stories . . . must not be read as simple biography and mistaken for chronicles of marvels which took place a long time ago. They are first of all a proclamation of what the risen Christ means for the writer, and they are issued as an invitation to the reader to discover the same reality in his own life. The reader of the miracle stories must ask himself, 'Is the risen Christ . . . the one who can transform my life like water into wine?'[51]

In other places, Richards expands this conclusion to include all

Johannine miracles, giving them a principal locus not in what Jesus once did literally, but in what takes effect in me in the present.[52] Whatever 'miracles' Jesus may have done, we can be certain that they would not be of the kind that made him out as a kind of 'Captain Marvel'.[53] Reginald H. Fuller also limits the miracles done by Jesus to a modest level.

> While the tradition that Jesus did perform exorcisms and healings (which may also have been exorcisms originally) is very strong, we can never be certain of the authenticity of any actual miracle story in the gospels. While a few may rest upon specific memory, most of them have probably been shaped out of generalized memories.[54]

Typical of the consensus that limits Jesus' actual miracles to a partially recoverable domain of exorcism - healing is the work of Joachim Jeremias.

> We can see from this how the material in the miracle stories dwindles considerably when it is subjected to a critical literary and linguistic investigation . . . if what has been said is right, plausible grounds can be advanced for supposing no less than four of the six synoptic nature miracles to be secondary in origin. . . .
> . . . a demonstrable historical nucleus remains. Jesus performed healings which astonished his contemporaries. These were primarily healings of psychogenous sufferings, especially what the texts describe as the driving out of demons, which Jesus performed with a brief word of command. There were also, however, healings of lepers (in the broad sense of the word as understood at that time), of the paralysed and the blind. These are happenings along the lines of what doctors call 'overpowering therapy'.[55]

However, there is something of the old-school 'naturalist' in Jeremias, and he often provides the reader with a non-miraculous item out of which the miracles might have 'plausibly' developed. He repeatedly appeals to linguistic error or misunderstanding as the basis of some miracles. He uses this principle to shed light on the origin of walking on the sea, on the number of demons thought to be involved in the Gadarene incident, and on the formation of the withering of the fig tree-story.[56] I find it as conceivable to believe that Jesus was standing on a half-submerged log as to believe that the story arose because the Greek phrase could mean 'on the sea' or 'by the sea' - i.e., on the sea(shore).

Gerd Theissen, also, while allowing that Jesus did work miracles, distinguishes between an historical level of miraculous activity, and its intensity as found in the Gospels.

> There is no doubt that Jesus worked miracles, healed the sick and cast out demons, but the miracle stories reproduce

> these historical events in an intensified form. However, this enhancement of the historical and factual begins with Jesus himself. For Jesus too the miracles here were not normal events, but elements in a mythical drama: in them the miraculous transformation of the whole world into the βασιλεία θεοῦ was being carried out. As an apocalyptic charismatic miracle worker, Jesus is unique in religious history.[57]

Towards an Evaluation of the Division in the Response to Miracle

It is possible to discover what is at stake in the different responses to miracle, and to choose between them. We can explore the range of theological beliefs in which the issue of possibility-impossibility is set, and also, the different interpretations of particular miracles in the Gospels. To do this, we need to refer to systematic, complete, interpretative responses to Jesus amid his miracles, where miracle has become a subject of conscious reflection. By choosing key examples, we shall be able to see clearly what is at stake in the retention or re-interpretation of miracles at any particular point, as well as at the more general level of Christian belief.

This more extensive response to miracle overcomes the obvious limitations of compiling ever-increasing amounts of interpretations of particular pericopes that exhibit a different response to the issue of miracle itself. We are in fact able to offer an answer to the question, and the issues raised, by Theissen, where he writes,

> The basic question is always, 'Are the miracle stories projections of social, historical and psychological factors or evidence of divine revelation?' Reductionist and restorative hermeneutics are here implacably opposed. Both place the centre of meaning of texts outside human subjectivity, either in a historical, social or psychological process operating without its knowledge or in a direct revelation confronting human beings from outside. Both tend to the view that the texts reflect something, either human (all too human) reality or revelation. This hermeneutical conflict is perhaps inescapable to-day for someone seriously investigating the meaning and truth of religious tradition. We possess no general hermeneutic which could bridge the gulf, and yet it would in the long run be an intolerable hermeneutical surrender simply to accept it.[58]

My method of procedure will point to a definite answer, or resolution of this division in the response to Jesus and his miracles. We do not, however, move too quickly to definitive interpretations of particular miracle stories, nor begin by adopting one or other world-view which settles the question of miracle itself. Nor do I begin by determining the 'direction-of-influence' holding between

the miracle stories of the Gospels and those of a wider milieu. A further way of responding to Jesus in his miracles remains.

We note that the historical dimension of inquiry into Jesus' miracles is shaped by the fact that the same primary sources, the four Gospels, are accessible in every century of interpretative activity. The interpretation of their miracle stories has not remained a constant, and has exhibited diverse positions on the question of whether miracles are possible. When we try to ask afresh about the limits of what Jesus could have done, and did in fact do, we cannot simply ignore these traditions of interpretation, nor necessarily hope to supplant them. On the one hand, we have those for whom walking on the water and raising Lazarus present no fundamental obstacles for belief, and who conclude that Jesus really did these things, - as indeed, the Gospels themselves seem to suggest. On the other hand there are those for whom these things remain axiomatically impossible. In between, lie all manner of variations.

I have chosen to respond to the divided state of response to miracle by following the internal logic of miracle to its own limits, as these limits have in fact been formed, or strongly intimated in the tradition of inquiry. By referring to the 'internal logic' of miracles, I do not mean anything too esoteric. I simply mean that I have selected examples of systematic responses to the miracles of the Gospels. These responses indicate, most clearly, what has been believed, in principle and in fact, where miracle-as-such has presented no obstacles to the inquiring intellect. These interpretations from the tradition of inquiry show, as it were, miracle in its element, where there have been virtually no limits to what could, and did come about. They show how miracle in the Gospels is responded to where belief in the reality of miracle is dominant, and not seriously impeded by a totally different outlook.

These responses are extremely valuable, and one of their benefits is to show the differences between a modern conservative seeking to recover an area of miraculous activity for Jesus, and the more ancient, non-problematical response to miracle.

To represent the tradition of interpretation in which Jesus, literally, and as a matter of faith and history, did exist surrounded by the most amazing wonders, I have chosen interpreters who have 'maximized' the reality and scope of miracle in their 'lives' of Jesus. From a different perspective, I have chosen interpreters

who have substantially revalued the place of miracle in any 'life' - leading in fact, to the critical dissolution of the miraculous. Thus, we are able to examine maximal and minimal responses to miracle at the level of general possibility and particular interpretation.

Aquinas and Newman both embody distinctive moments in the tradition of response to Jesus in his miracles. They constitute maximal responses, in their emphasis on the literal reality of miracle. They constitute well-defined, well-trodden pathways for anyone in the present who considers that he is obliged to admit the literally miraculous into the life of Jesus, and indeed elsewhere. They present the challenge: If you seek to re-admit, or recover a place for the literally miraculous, why believe anything substantially different from this pair? Are you also prepared to accept the outlook and the framework of beliefs and concepts in which these conclusions about miracles were reached? They show, in fact, what has been done where belief in miracle has been taken to 'natural', non-problematical limits, in consistent outlooks and by the application of first principles of inquiry.

In studying their responses to miracle, we shall be struck by the extent of the differences between their conclusions and even those of a modern conservative. Some of these differences will be due to different principles of approach or inquiry. H. G. Gadamer says two things that suggest the value of trying to respond to miracle through a study of the tradition of interpretation that focusses on maximal and minimal points. He writes,

> By hermeneutics is understood the theory or art of explication . . . to put ourselves right at the middle of the problematic, we have to submit the concepts involved in the nomenclature of the topic to a reflection on their conceptual history.[59]

And in another place,

> The full hermeneutical significance of the fact that tradition is linguistic in nature is clearly revealed when the tradition is a written one. . . . In the form of writing, all tradition is simultaneous with any present time.[60]

From several aspects then, there is value in selecting complete, systematic and different responses to miracle from the tradition of interpretation. Firstly, we see the scope actually possessed by miracle in the tradition of inquiry, and something of the potential or otherwise for novel responses, both to miracle in general, and to particular stories. We gain access to an interpreter's theological activity, not, solely, as it refers to

conceptual clarifications of what have become abstract terms, but we see the significance of their terminology as it interacts with the concrete miracle stories before them, and their response to the individual at their centre. Not least, we see what Aquinas and Newman believed in specific cases, and this turns out not to be without its own shocks.

In examining responses to miracle that have come to lie in, if not to form, new and differing traditions, we become aware of the nature and significance of changes in terms that have a central place in theology. For example, we observe that 'history' comes to mean something altogether different according to whether it is judged that history can, and did, contain these miracles, or whether it is concluded that the historical and the miraculous remain disparate; the former, almost by axiom, not admitting the latter into its domain. In the earlier tradition of inquiry, the miraculous dimension was formed from a conception through to an Ascension which took place in historical time. In typically 'modern' responses to Jesus in his miracles, these realities interact with historical reality in a different way, not just, as it were, by historical accident, but of necessity.

Gadamer also referred to writing making <u>all</u> tradition simultaneous with any present time. The Gospels have, for example, been 'simultaneous with every present time' since their formulation. But in 'maximal' and 'minimal' respondents, we, in our present, receive, almost as a legacy, the definitive responses of other ages to Gospel miracles, into our own time.

To balance the responses of Aquinas and Newman, I want to emphasize the responses to miracle and the interpretation of miracle stories formed by D. F. Strauss, Newman's contemporary, and by R. Bultmann. In these paired and differing interpretations, we shall see the differences that exist at the level of detail and principle. By adopting, wherever possible, the pattern of Jesus' miracles consisting of conception through to Resurrection-Ascension, we are able to focus on the compact reality of methodological reflection and exegesis, without straying too far into one at the expense of the other.

In referring to the pattern or structure of the miraculous, extending from conception to Resurrection-Ascension, we discover that miracle cannot be simply confined to a central section of Jesus' activity while the rest is treated somewhat separately. Neither

are we at first justified in placing all the emphasis on the primacy of Resurrection. As we discover, it does raise special issues of its own. But we begin by trying to respond uniformly to miracle per se, wherever we find it, and in whatever form, presuming that all the variants have, in fact, rather more things in common than features that isolate them. Miracle has something of a unifying capacity on the material of the four Gospels, as different stages of Jesus' 'career' are referred to - unless, of course, one has already taken a critical decision to minimize and limit its impact.

I referred to Resurrection as being somewhat miraculous, yet possessing features that make it distinctive. I want to suggest that in the Gospels Resurrection appears as something like a permanent or enduring miracle that commences at the 'end' of a life marked by miracles of temporary duration and effect. It might prove useful to coin the term 'miraculization' to refer to what is said to happen to Jesus' complete human life in Resurrection. It appears as a state somewhat permanently miraculous with respect to the conditions and limits of a natural life, and it is almost as if, in Resurrection, Jesus is absorbed into miracle. Whereas others were the recipients of particular, short-term miracles, even ones that seemed to require a temporary alteration of his bodily state, here, he himself is the recipient and subject of this 'miracle'. And it is not temporary. He does not return from it to a merely natural life - it is as if he has become 'miraculized'.

This, then, is how I propose to overcome the limitations of piece-meal responses to individual pericopes (useful and necessary as they are), and general studies of world-views. We pursue the distinctive notion of miracle through a study that combines theoretical and exegetical issues, by examining principal and systematic responses to the Gospel miracles from conception through to Ascension.

To the studies of these theologians, I add a section devoted to issues raised rather more by the Gospel of Mark itself. Having examined these maximal and minimal responses to miracle, Mark is approached by asking the question, 'Can we make sense of Mark on the assumption that Jesus really did the miracles attributed to him?'

I close this chapter by noting something of what is at stake in the inquiry, and some of the sources of motivation to undertake it. Nicholas Lash, for instance, writes,

> If it is part of the definition of a 'perfectly normal human being' that there can be no evidence that he embodies and discloses, in his humanity, the presence and character of God, in a manner and to an extent that most of us do not, then: either no prophets or holy men are 'perfectly normal human beings' or there can be no grounds for reasonable affirming that any particular individual is a prophet or holy man.[61]

E. and M.-L. Keller give a clear statement of what is largely at stake in the inquiry, though their tone indicates the particular conclusion they will reach.

> If one looks at the New Testament first of all - it makes a difference to the way one thinks of Jesus. Is he a mighty being of superhuman power, who can manipulate the elements as he wills, stilling the storms and the waves, conjuring fish into the fisherman's net, abolishing the force of gravity, and altering his own material substance so that one moment he is a man who can be touched and eat and drink, and at the next a spirit who can pass through closed doors? Or is he an ordinary man who did nothing like this at all, and never wanted to; a man whose enormous significance expressed itself not in any physical abnormality but merely in his behavior and in his destiny? . . . faith itself bears a different stamp according to the object towards which it is directed.[62]

This study has in fact enabled me to reach a solution to the question of Jesus in his miracles, having paid full attention to the issues raised. I have tried to avoid the tendency to diminish the significance of the miraculous element in the Gospels, while not ascribing, too readily, a dimension to them which they may turn out not to possess. As Theissen has written,

> The ancient Church's pride in the miraculous has turned into its opposite. A 'philological cultural Protestantism' finds them too primitive; hermeneutical profundity suspends them, 'explains' them and buries them with praise. Orthodox insistence on their factual reality has been as little able to prevent this as the apodictic simplicity of the fundamentalists. Their impotent objections are quite justified but have to be thought through, purged of all anti-intellectualism, before they become valid. But then it turns out that the minimising of miracle by modern restorative hermeneutics is often only somewhat more respectful (and also vaguer) than their disillusioned reduction. In the one case they are minimised from above, in the other from below. All these profound interpretations often reveal all too clearly 'how much store the theologians set by the miracles they defend, and how far from anxious they really are that our world should be disturbed by these alien visitors'.[63]

CHAPTER II

AQUINAS: THE LIMITLESS MIRACLES OF JESUS

Jesus the Fundamental Miracle

Conception: a Miracle in its Mode
God is Born of a Woman

The non-contribution of Joseph as husband and father forms only part of the miracle of Jesus' origin. Something not necessarily contained in, nor presumed by the miracle of a woman conceiving a child without a man, also takes place and is also referred to as miraculous. Aquinas writes,

> Or, you can argue that in the mystery of the incarnation there is not only a miracle in the matter which was conceived, but rather more in the mode of conception and of giving birth, because a virgin conceived and gave birth to God.[1] (Italics mine)

In this modal miracle, we refer to the Incarnation, as something that began with the material or biological miracle, but is not itself the same as that miracle. Hence, in addressing miracle as it surrounds the figure of Jesus at His human beginnings and persists throughout the life that follows, we need to refer to this double-aspect of the miraculous. I propose to refer to the modal miracle first.

Aquinas referred to the miracle of the mode of conception in answering the question 'whether Christ's flesh was derived from Adam'. His clear answer is that the matter which is required for this human life does in fact derive from Adam, or as is the case, more immediately from Mary His biological mother. But, there is more to Christ than what derives from the maternal source, and more, even, than from a miraculously provided 'equivalent' to the paternal source. There is more to Christ than what would derive from the miraculously augmented contribution of one human parent, in which the miracle consisted of making up what was lacking by the absence of the other parent. That would be a purely 'material' miracle, the formation of a complete human being from incomplete natural resources - but Aquinas insists that there is more to the

formation of Christ than this, and it is in this 'extra' dimension that we discover the 'modal' miracle. Thus, in the reference above, the miracle was not said to consist of a virgin conceiving and giving birth simply to a human child. And again,

> The second man, i.e. Christ, is said to be from heaven in respect not of his bodily matter, but of what was formative of his body, or also respecting his very divinity.[2]

The modal aspect of miracle at Jesus' origin concerns the extent to which one can say that while it was a real human baby that was born, primarily, it was God Himself who was conceived and entered the world. Hence, the miracle consists of Mary as woman, becoming the mother of what is intrinsically not human but Divine. The miracle is that here, what is intrinsically not human is in fact human in this baby, while its Divinity is in no way diminished.

In the same place that Aquinas refers to the modal miracle, he qualifies the sense in which it is a miracle, and distinguishes it from miracles intended to have a public or visible effect in particular circumstances. The hiddenness of the Incarnation, a theme which we develop in the chapter on Newman, is already intimated in Aquinas' response to the miraculous here.

> . . . the mystery of Christ's incarnation is something miraculous not because arranged for the confirmation of faith, but as an article of faith.[3]

This difference seems to be of some importance, especially were one to be concerned with the related issues of the evidential value of the miracles worked by Jesus, and the moment when the substantial truth of the incarnational reality was made accessible to those around him. So, in another place, Aquinas had written,

> We note too that some miracles are direct objects of belief as, for example, the virginal birth, the resurrection, the Sacrament of the Altar. Our Lord wanted <u>these</u> to be more hidden so that faith in them would be more meritorious. The purpose of <u>other</u> miracles, however, is to confirm our faith. They should be more patent.[4] (Italics mine)

The modal miracle in which the man Jesus exists can be expressed as the statement that God is conceived and born, while it is a real baby that comes to birth. From the beginning then, the name 'Jesus' does not <u>simply</u> name a man, though it does really name a man. The sense in which it is God who comes to birth by Mary can be grasped where he speaks of Christ's two births.

> Now in Christ there are two natures, the divine and the human. The divine nature he receives eternally from his Father; the human he receives in time from his mother.

> So we need to attribute two nativities to Christ; one in which he is eternally born of the Father, the other by which he is born in time of his mother.[5]

This relates to the miraculous aspect of Christ's entrance into the world because it is one and the same Christ that 'experiences' these two births. They are two distinct nativities but they belong to the same being. The being born eternally of the Father as Son, at a particular moment is born from Mary in the reality of the human life conceived in her. It is the same Christ who is 'said to be born twice when born once from eternity and once in time'.[6] It is the primary birth, the one from eternity that settles the issue of Jesus' identity, and provides us with the 'what' that the name indicates, and the correct sense for the term 'Son of God'. The one eternally born from the Father, has a second birth added to Him - birth from a human mother.

> Hence though in his human nature he is created and justified, he is not to be called Son of God by reason of creation or justification, but only by reason of his eternal generation whereby he is Son of the Father alone.[7]

Yet, in this, it is really a human baby that is born. The necessity of accommodating this reality, and the fact of the Deity and humanity in the one named Jesus, leads to a technical definition of the union that exists in this Incarnation - what we have approached in Aquinas' terms as the modal miracle of the woman conceiving and giving birth to God. Liam G. Walsh provides a technical definition of this where he defines the <u>hypostatic</u> union as

> The act by which the <u>person</u> of the Word, subsisting eternally in the divine nature, takes as his own an individual human nature and continues in time to subsist in it; consequently, the relationship between the divine and human natures arising from their being in one person; the union is called hypostatic from the Greek <u>hupo-stasis</u> (subsistent) because the union is on the level of subsistence.[8]

Though we have not as yet outlined Aquinas' account of the biological miracle, we have begun to outline his beliefs about the identity of the Jesus who exists both from eternity and from that moment of conception. Over and above the biological miracle, this coming to human birth of God the Son is not only somewhat miraculous, but is, arguably, the fulcrum by which all Jesus' miracles are attained, and the framing reality that provides them with their rationale. When we consider the Gospel miracles, we find a number of things that exceed the powers of man, as we might reasonably set limits for them. But we find that with respect to Jesus, the Virgin has

conceived and given birth to God. In responding to the miracles, we shall be faced with the need to refer them to God, and at the same time to respond to them as acts of the human Jesus.

There is a real problem here in maintaining the reality of Jesus in his human nature. The more one wants to say that he did miracles that are beyond the powers of a man, the more one seems to distance him from humanity, and make him a member of a species that is not really human at all, but of some higher order. It is in this setting that Aquinas discusses the origin and primary locus of those powers sufficient to work miracles. His conclusion is that even in the Incarnation, Christ in his human soul and will does not possess a native power to work miracles. In this respect he is not distanced from the human species. His human will effectively works miracles, though not because of what is germane to it. Though it will be as a man that Jesus works miracles, they are not worked because of what pertains simply to this humanity.

On the one hand, we might begin with the presumption that it is the man Jesus who multiplies the loaves and fishes, and permit this because of the belief that Christ is not simply a man, on account of the Incarnation. It is in this context that Aquinas asks, 'Was the soul of Christ omnipotent in changing creatures?'[9] His answer to this is a plain no. The reason for saying no seems to be that the alternative would render Christ no longer human at all. He would be a higher being, if not God, pure and simple. Having said that however, he develops the way in which the man Jesus can be really said to be responsible for miracles.

> If then we speak of the soul of Christ in terms of its own native ability, whether of nature or of grace, it has power to do all those things which the soul is meant to do - things like governing the body and arranging human actions; and even enlightening, from his fulness of grace and knowledge, all thinking creatures . . .
>
> If, however, we speak of the soul of Christ as an instrument of the Word that is united to it, it has an instrumental power to bring about all the miraculous changes which can serve the purpose of the Incarnation.[10]

The sense in which the man Jesus is really responsible for, and causes the miracles, comes down to the extent to which, in the reality of the Incarnation, it is in fact artificial to consider 'the soul of Christ (merely) in terms of its native ability'. At what point does one permit the effective instrumentality of the Word, incarnate as this man, to become effective? At what level of ontological reality does this instrumentality exist?

> In the same way Christ, as the Word of God, was able to do all things well by calling his divinity into play. But one must maintain . . . that there is a human as well as a divine activity in Christ . . . The humanity of Christ is an instrument of the divinity. But it is not an inert instrument, such as would merely be moved without in any way moving itself. It is a living instrument, with a spiritual soul, which itself acts even when it is being acted upon.[11] (Italics mine)

Thus, we can find that in the act of the Word by which a miracle is the end result, the human soul and will of Jesus is also fully and freely acting, as an instrument really involved in bringing about, say, the abundance of bread and fish. But the power for this end is not contained in his capacity to break bread or speak the words of blessing as such, but here, these human actions are the instrument of the (Incarnate) Word. In this same sense of instrumentality, the man Jesus wills his own Resurrection, though again, the power to attain it is not a native property of his will, but an instrumental property whose proper locus is in the Word.

> The soul of Christ willed things in two different ways. He willed some things to be done by himself. And here it must be affirmed that whatever he willed he was able to do. It would not be in keeping with his wisdom to want to do something by himself which did not lie within his power.
>
> But then he also willed things to be done by the divine power, such as the resurrection of his own body and other such miraculous works. These were things he could not do by his own power, but only as an instrument of the divinity.[12]

This establishes the sense in which Jesus the man both is and is not causally responsible for acts that exceed the powers of a man. The notion of instrumentality is employed to assert that the miracles are, really, human acts, while at the same time they employ the power of God, where the power of the man is inadequate. But the human intention and act is real, and not just a mask for the Deity. Though the Incarnation of the Word makes a difference to what the man can do, it does not mean that Jesus' human soul in its capacities is other than human. Aquinas maintains a strong sense of the reality of Jesus' humanity in its completeness and human limits, even where the subject is the miracles that tend to require something more than what a man can do. Incarnational instrumentality sees the capacity for miracle devolve from its proper place in the Godhead to its no less genuine place in the man Jesus. Though there is nothing here to prevent the belief that any man could also become the instrument by which miracles are worked, it remains a separable question to determine the degree of instrumentality in each case, and the extent to which it approached the Incarnational instrumentality.

In Jesus' case we find,

> A thing is termed an instrument because it is moved by a principal agent . . . Accordingly, the action of an instrument precisely as instrument is not distinct from the activity of the principal agent. Yet, as a reality with its own nature, it may also possess another activity. Applying this to the case of Christ: the activity of his human nature, in so far as that nature is the instrument of the divinity, is not distinct from the activity of the divinity; for it is one and the same saving action by which his humanity and his divinity save us. At the same time Christ's human nature, as a nature, possessed its own activity distinct from the divine activity . . . there must be two distinct activities in Christ, corresponding to his two natures; yet each of these activities, on being exercised, is numerically one so that, for example, Christ had a single act of walking and a single act of healing.[13] (Italics mine)

We can see something of what Aquinas means by Christ having 'a single act of healing' in the following example. He refers to an otherwise unidentified 'divine activity' co-operating or combining with the human activity of touching, to produce the single effect - healing.

> The distinctive effect of Christ's divine activity and that of his human activity are quite distinct. Healing a leper is a distinctive effect of his divine activity; touching him is a distinct effect of his human nature. And yet the two activities co-operate in producing a single effect for, as has been shown, one nature acts in communion with the other.[14]

Christ touches the man because he wills that he recover. In this human, intentional act, the Divine will, with the power to heal, also acts as part of the one reality, taking the act of the human will as its instrument, and making the human touch effective. This model could be extended to include those healings (touching his garments unawares) where Jesus' human will seems to be bypassed.

While the agent from whom the power derives is God, in some senses, it would be artificial to force the distinction between this Divine source, and the instrumental agency of the human Jesus. We could recall at this moment that we began by referring to the modal miracle in which God was said to be born of the woman. Aquinas does not reduce this aspect of miracle to a merely occasionalist instrumentality that has no other reality or existence except when Jesus' human will engages the Divine source of power. The healings are equally God's and this man's, not ultimately the formers rather than the latters. As R.J. Hennessey wrote, 'Any human deed of Jesus . . . is the very embodiment of God's eternal saving will'.[15] (Italics mine)

It seems that the union between God and man exists at a level prior to particular, instrumental engagements of the human and the divine wills. The union exists at a level prior to any particular acts, and is, according to our first reference, somewhat miraculous.

Conception: a Miracle in its Matter
A Child is Conceived without a Father

Turning to the simply human and biological aspect of the miraculous as it surrounds Jesus' origin, we find that it consists of Mary's conceiving the child without the natural contribution of the human father. 'We must confess without any qualifications that the mother of Christ was a virgin in conceiving'.[16] Aquinas believed that the miraculous dimension continues from the conception to the birth itself - she remains a virgin 'while giving birth'.[17] He discusses the view that Mary's biological virginity is not affected by the birth because the one born already possesses the qualities of the resurrection body, enabling ready passage through media that would otherwise impede him. He rejects this appeal to the premature glorification of Jesus' body, and chooses to account for this aspect of the birth by a momentary miracle.

> Some say that Christ assumed the gift of subtlety in his birth, i.e. when he came forth from the closed womb of a virgin; and that when he walked on the sea with dry feet he assumed the gift of agility. But this is not consistent with what we have already said. Such gifts belong to the glorified body. They are the result of the glory in the soul flowing into the body, as we shall explain when we treat of glorified bodies. And we have emphasized that before his passion he allowed his flesh to do and suffer what was proper to it, without any of the soul's glory flowing over into the body.
>
> Hence we must conclude that these things happened miraculously by divine power. Augustine writes Closed doors were no problem for that body in which God dwelt. If in his birth his mother's virginity was left intact then he certainly had the power to go through the closed doors. [18]

Later, we shall consider what the glorification of Resurrection, and the miraculous, have in common. For the moment, it seems that both would be ways in which things that seem extraordinary to us could be brought about.

Even where discussing the biological aspects of Jesus' miraculous origin, the question of the precise, Trinitarian identity of the one conceived is never far away. The connection between the virginal conception and the identity of the one conceived, the Word or Son of God, remains significant,

> That the mother of Christ was a virgin while giving birth is beyond all doubt. . . . This is appropriate for three reasons. The first involves the unique character of the one born, i.e. the Word of God. Now we not only conceive a word, we also say it without any diminution to the mind. To underline then, that the body of Christ was indeed the Word of God it was appropriate for him to be born of one whose virginity was left completely intact.[19]

Aquinas' account of the physical or gynaecological dimension of the miracle is given in terms of the biological 'science' of the day. Roland Potter observes,

> It seems there was little gynaecological advance from Aristotle for over 1,000 years; much of his theory of genetic biology is obsolete, and may here be neglected. Note the guarded and vague reference to 'female semen'; it need give no pause for thought. The ancient and medieval worlds were ignorant of the process of ovulation, and had curious ideas about menstruation.[20]

This understanding of the organic processes involved in conception does not of itself interfere with the basic perception that the conception and nativity of the child takes place without the normal contribution of the male parent. The point is, that Aquinas sets out the conception as in every respect like a normal conception, except for joint-parental contribution and factors dependent on that. The Divine power achieves, besides and apart from the male seed, what would normally be achieved by it.

> But it was according to the natural mode of conception that the matter from which Christ's body was formed was similar to that which other women furnish for the conception of a child. According to Aristotle, this matter is the woman's blood, not of any sort, but blood which has been brought to a more perfect secretion by man's generative faculty, so that the matter is rightly disposed for conception. Of such matter was Christ's body conceived. . . . it is from a certain secretion of pure blood which by a process of elimination is prepared for conception, being, as it were, more pure and more perfect than the rest of the blood. Nevertheless in the conception of other men, it gets tainted with lust inasmuch as by sexual intercourse the blood is drawn to a place apt for conception. This, however, did not take place in Christ's conception. For then the blood was brought together in the Virgin's womb and fashioned into a child by the operation of the Holy Spirit. And so Christ's body is said to be formed of the most chaste and purest blood of the Virgin.[21]

As we see then, at the level of human biology, the end result of the miracle is the human child, and from Mary's point of view, her contribution is the same as would be required for a natural conception. The agent is however the Holy Spirit, achieving the end otherwise attained by the different human means. Since the

Divine agent achieves the desired result in a way that bypasses the means and instrumentalities of natural conception, the material needed for the conception, the 'certain secretion of pure blood', is said to avoid the contaminating taint of lust. It seems as if we have a kind of compact theological-biology or biological theology here. Even granted that one was still responding to a literally miraculous conception, with a definite biological basis, we would no doubt want to distinguish the biological from the theological at this point.

Whenever we focus on the biological or material aspect of the miracle, the framing Trinitarian reality is not far away. We have seen that it is the Word who is conceived, and what the Word is conceived in (or as), is brought into human form by the Holy Spirit. Aquinas believed that the acts of creating the human life (by the Holy Spirit) and assuming the created reality (by the Son or Word) had to occur simultaneously. Under no circumstances could they follow one another in time. He avoids any possibility of saying that a man existed who became God, which would be the case if the Holy Spirit created the child, who was then, even a moment later, assumed by God the Son.[22]

There are further somewhat miraculous realities surrounding Jesus in his pre-natal life. Aquinas believed that the child in the womb was 'spiritually perfect' from the outset, and that as part of this perfection, 'in the first instant of his conception had the use of freewill', and 'could at once make a free choice'.[23] In addition, the one in the womb was a source of sanctification for others from the first instant of human life, and as such, possessed a sanctification greater than that achieved not only by other infants, but fully-fledged adults. 'Consequently he was sanctified in a motion towards God of his own freewill, which is indeed meritorious'.[24] And, 'Christ in the first instant of his conception received not only as much grace as have those who see God, but even greater grace than all who see God. . . . he had an actual vision of God, seeing God in his essence more clearly than other creatures'.[25] The possession of these qualities appears to be somewhat extraordinary!

When we come to discuss the miracles worked by Jesus, we find one class organized around 'spiritual substances' - demons and angels. The angelic dimension enters into the conception of Jesus, where the angel Gabriel announces the fact to Mary (Lk 1: 26). Aquinas emphasizes the literal, perceptual reality of the appearing

angel.

> The angel appeared bodily to the blessed Virgin. This fitted in first with the message itself, since he came to tell of the incarnation of the invisible God. . . . she was to receive the Son of God in her womb as well as in her mind. It was right, then, to refresh the senses of her body as well as the eyes of her mind by the angel's vision . . . The blessed Virgin saw not only physically but intellectually as well.[26]

For Aquinas, the angel was a character who could literally enter into the events of human history, and here, visibly appear and address the Mother of the Son of God.

From the very beginning, Jesus' life is surrounded by and participates in the miraculous. Extending the modal aspect of the miracle in which the Virgin conceived and gave birth to God, we find that Jesus in his own being and activity persists in this somewhat miraculous mode, for his humanity abides and endures in God the Son. Though the conception is itself a momentary miracle in its biological aspect, it is but the first of many miracles to come, some of which are greater than this, and apparently, far more public.

To-day, we might distinguish the theological from the historical in a number of these places, and so tend to set aside something of the miraculous. But to appreciate the miraculous in its own scope and power, we have to realize that this was a distinction Aquinas was scarcely concerned to make, where the theological and the historical co-existed around the central miraculous reality.

The Star and the Dove

I have linked Aquinas' references to these otherwise disparate items because they share a common feature in his response to the miraculous. Both are said to be literal, new creations of God, made to achieve a special purpose or task. In this respect, they stand out from their fellows.

The star (Matt. 2:2,7,9-10) leads the Magi to the child Jesus. On their departure from Herod, its movement takes on a miraculous character: 'the star . . . went before them, till it came to rest over the place where the child was'. The star is perceived to be a guide, not merely a curious stellar phenomenon. Matthew makes no further reference to the star once it has come to rest.

Aquinas moves directly from the Church's liturgical time to historical time in Jesus' life. Common to the Feast of the Epiphany are three miracles:

> the adoration of the Magi, which took place in the first year of the Lord's birth; secondly, the baptism of Christ . . . on the same day thirty years later; thirdly, this marriage, which took place on the same day one year later.[27]

The first two events possess miraculous features - the Magi are guided in this extraordinary way, and at the baptism, the dove that descends is also somewhat miraculous.

Aquinas is able to extract details from Matthew and Luke and combine them in one historical tableau. Matthew's Magi and Luke's shepherds exist in the one history, separated only by the thirteen days between their respective visits to the child.

> Christ's birth was first made known to the shepherds on the very day of his birth, as Luke relates, . . . Secondly, the Magi reached Christ on the thirteenth day after his birth, on which day the feast of the Epiphany is celebrated. Had they come at the end of the year or after two years, they would not have found him in Bethlehem, for Luke writes . . .[28]

Details of the Magi's itinerary can be inferred from a number of elements in the Gospels. Herod slays the boys two years old and under, and as Lukan considerations set the Magi's arrival in Jesus' first year, Aquinas concludes that the star appeared two years before the birth. Herod slays the two-year olds in case Jesus had been born when the star first appeared. As the Magi had time to prepare and be on the way, they were able to arrive so soon after the birth, on the thirteenth day. Aquinas passes over the views of Remy of Auxerre, who said that the star first appeared at Jesus' birth, but the Magi still arrive thirteen days later due to Divine guidance and swift camels.

Turning to the movement of the star, we observe that Aquinas has a highly developed sense of the fixed and regular trajectories of these bodies. It is in this context that he refers to stars and angels as different heavenly denizens, for the latter are rational agents who can move at will, and one possible response to the identity of the star is to see it as an angel, and thus account for movement that a star is not capable of. The alternative, angel or star, is offered and discussed where he asks the question 'whether the star which appeared to the Magi belonged to the heavenly system'.[29] He cites Augustine to the effect that both angels and stars can be referred to as 'the speech of heaven', and suggests that it was in fact 'one of heaven's stars', and not an angel that guided the Magi. But I have suggested that Aquinas had a well-developed sense of the regularity of stellar movement.

For the star to be one of 'heaven's' stars would mean that a great departure from this fixed motion had taken place. It would have had to be 'one of those which from the beginning of creation kept their ordered courses under the Creator's law'.[30] And again, we see his sense of the regular motion of the stars where he writes 'The angels of heaven by reason of their office come down to us, being sent to minister. But the stars of heaven do not leave their places'.[31]

Aquinas is thus faced with having to account for the unusual motion of the star that guides the Magi. He does not conclude that the star is in fact an angel, which would describe the motion as natural for a higher, rational being acting as an intelligent guide. He refers to Chrysostom's account of why the motion could not be that of a simply natural star. Aquinas writes

> No other star has such a course to south from north, that is to Judea from Persia where the Magi came from . . . the star appeared not only at night but also in broad daylight, and no star can do this, not even the moon.* Third, the star sometimes appeared and sometimes disappeared. . . . its motion was not continuous. For when the Magi had to go on, it went on: when they stopped, it stopped too. . . . it indicated the virginal birth, not by staying aloft, but by coming down. The star which they had seen in the east went before them, till it came to rest over the place where the child was (Matt. 2:9). From this it is evident that the Magi's words, we have seen his star in the east, are not to be understood as meaning they were in the east when the star appeared over Judea, but rather when they saw the star it was in the east and that it preceded them into Judea.[32] **

Aquinas maintains, quite reasonably, that no star in its natural order and place could do all this.

Considering this, he chooses an explanation that involves the miraculous. However, he does not say that God uses His power to cause a star to depart from its path and move in this extraordinary way. As if an additional sign of the miracle of the Virgin conceiving and giving birth to the man who is yet a

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* As a matter of fact the moon can do this.

** Raymond E. Brown, The Birth of The Messiah: A commentary on the infancy narratives in Matthew and Luke (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1978), p. 188, speaks of 'Intrinsic unlikelihoods' in an historical interpretation of this story, including 'A star that rose in the East, appeared over Jerusalem, turned south to Bethlehem, and then came to rest over a house.' This 'celestial phenomenon unparalleled in astronomical history' receives no notice in the records of the times. Significantly, there are a number of non-miraculous features in the story that he also finds intrinsically unlikely.

new man not simply derived from human generation, Aquinas concludes that the star is a newly created star. It is not one of the stars of old redirected into a novel pathway, but a novel star created to deliver the message from heaven. God must first make the star before he makes it move, and in this, the miracle seems somewhat greater. He cites Augustine with approval,

> This star was not one of those which from the beginning of creation kept their ordered courses under the Creator's law; but a new star which appeared at the sight of a Virgin giving birth.

and again, Aquinas himself says,

> It seems more likely, however, that it was a newly created star, not in heaven, but in the atmosphere surrounding the earth; this star moved at the behest of the divine will.[33]

I mentioned that there is a link between this response to the Magi's star, and the dove that descended upon Jesus at the baptism. Just as the star is newly created, so too is the dove. It is a dove that was not hatched from any egg. Initially he cites some who say 'Just as the Holy Spirit came down upon the baptized Lord in the form of a dove, so he appeared to the Magi in the form of a star'.[34] More clearly, in another place he writes,

> And since the Holy Spirit is called the Spirit of Truth (John 16:13), therefore he too made a real dove in which to appear, though he did not assume it into the unity of his person.[35]

He cites Augustine with approval; 'But it was easy for Almighty God, who created all creatures out of nothing, to fashion the real body of a dove without the help of other doves, just as it was easy for him to form a real body in Mary's womb without the seed of a man'.[36] This reference to the miraculous shows, amongst other things, how far removed Aquinas is from some attempts to maintain an underlying historicity for the baptismal accounts. The dove is by no means a convenient, passing bird that, providentially, happened to alight on his shoulder at the right time.

Aquinas opposes any attempt to interpret the Magi's star in an astrological sense.* Astrology has nothing to say of stars that leave their orbit at a birth, nor do astrologers tell from the stars those who are born, but they 'tell the future from the hour of a man's birth'[37] a detail the Magi know nothing of.

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*R. Bultmann, also refers to works that effectively deny an astrological sense or basis for this story. (R. Bultmann, The History of the Synoptic Tradition, translated from the second German edition (1931) by John Marsh (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1972), n. 1, p. 293).

Old Testament sources and apocryphal references are available to Aquinas, but they do not determine the interpretation of the Gospel reference to the Magi and their star. There is not the faintest hint that, say, Balaam's reference to a star that shall rise out of Jacob (Numbers 24:17) could have been the source, or one of the sources for this story. And being in Scripture has a greater value or authority than material from the apocrypha. * When referring to Chrysostom's use of an apocryphal account of a story with some similarities to the Magi story of the Gospel, he seems rather to mention it in passing, rather than respond to it as of equal interest or significance.[38]

Some of to-day's different responses to miracle in the Gospels do not depend so much on the discovery of new material, but on an entirely different approach to material long available. In the previous note, we saw the differences in Aquinas' response to material in John, as against material in The History of the Infancy of the Saviour. To-day, for example, we find R.E. Brown approving B. Lindars' suggestion that the Cana miracle account could have been derived from the apocryphal environment. **

In Aquinas' interpretation of the story of the Magi and the star, we were left in no doubt that we were dealing both with a star, and with the miraculous. Modern interpretation that still looks for an historical core to this story is more at home with either a star or the miraculous, but not so much both. Where

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* John outweighs The History of the Infancy of the Saviour when it comes to cataloguing Jesus' miracles and marking their beginning. 'When he says "This beginning of signs Jesus worked in Cana of Galilee" . . . We can see the falsity of the History of the Infancy of the Saviour, which recounts many miracles worked by Christ as a boy. For if these accounts were true, the Evangelist would not have said "This beginning".' Aquinas, John, Sn. 364, p. 159.

** 'What is new in Lindars' theory, is the suggestion that the pre-Johannine folk-legend . . . was of the kind found in the apocryphal gospels of Jesus' boyhood . . . of which The Infancy Gospel of Thomas is a good example. . . . such apocryphal gospels reflect tendencies that were present in Christian thought or imagination at an early date. . . . Thus, the pre-Lukan story of Jesus in the Temple and the pre-Johannine story of a miracle worked at Cana may represent first-century Christian speculation on the "hidden life" of Jesus.' Raymond E. Brown, Biblical Reflections on Crises Facing the Church (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1975) pp. 97-8. Citing B. Lindars, The Gospel of John (London: Oliphants, 1972), 126-27.

Roland Potter stresses more extensive allusions to the Old Testament, and that 'fuller exegesis can glean more from historical analogies and from elsewhere', he in fact moves right away from the idea that we are dealing with a star at all.

> We conclude quite simply that the star of Bethlehem was some miraculous phenomenon, only to be compared to the pillar of fire which led the chosen people by night (Exodus 13:21) or that brightness from God that shone around the shepherds (Luke 2:9), or the light from heaven in the story of St. Paul's conversion (Acts 9:13).39

On the other hand, some modern, apparently conservative exegesis has retained the literal star at the same time as the miraculous dimension has been altered to amazing coincidence. This may provide an unintentional irony in the title, The Secularisation of Christianity.*

Miracles in the sky above provide an excellent transition into Aquinas' classification of miracles in the life of Jesus, where, to my mind, miracles even greater than the wonder of the novel star are to be found. In this next section, the full extent of admitting the literally miraculous into the interpretation of Jesus in the Gospels will be seen.

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* The Magi are steering towards the nightly zenith of a supernova, which gets them as far as Jerusalem, 'but their observations were not accurate enough to fix the spot exactly'. The prophecies then direct them to Bethlehem, but Mascall interprets 'the star went before them' to mean 'the star coming up in the sky'. And, 'stood over where the young child was' means 'reached the zenith' since, 'when a star comes to the zenith it gives the impression of momentarily halting before continuing the downward part of its path'. All that is left of the miraculous is that the light from the supernova happens to arrive at the same time as the nativity. He speaks condescendingly of those who 'seem to think of the star as luring the Magi like a carrot before a donkey's nose'. His comment that 'this may, for all we know, be the one midrashic story which is literally true, the midrash for the sake of which the whole midrashic style was devised' is both fanciful and inadequate. If midrash has to be appealed to on another occasion, say for the withering of the fig tree, then do we have another midrash for the sake of which . . . ? And is a tree withering before the disciples' eyes any more naive than a star leading men as a carrot leads a donkey? In addition, I think it would be easier for God to move the star than to keep tabs on the complicated literary arrangement Mascall describes. E. Mascall, The Secularisation of Christianity: An Analysis and a Critique (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1965), n. 2, p. 278.

Jesus' Miracles

Heavenly Bodies: Fivefold
Moon Miracle

Aquinas organized the miracles into four groups: those pertaining to spiritual substances, heavenly bodies, man, and to irrational creatures.[40] As we have been speaking of the star, it is best to continue with other miracles of the heavenly system.

Mark (15:33 par.) refers to darkness that covered the land for three hours while Jesus was on the cross. Aquinas believed that this darkness was due to a miracle and not to a providential cloud cover or eclipse. His interpretation of this passage virtually justifies the decision to follow particular, representative theologians to the limits of their beliefs about miracles in Jesus' life. His interpretation here shows the extent to which the admission of the literally miraculous can take us. It would be very unfortunate if we took the advice of the translators at this point, who write, 'Even a curious student of theology may skip the following reply'.[41] Far from being a random judgement or aberration, his account of the darkness conforms to his theological principles, displays their capacities and limits, and can be said to show Aquinas' picture of Jesus in its sharpest focus.

Aquinas does not simply choose between a miraculous and a non-miraculous explanation. He discriminates between the miraculous and the non-miraculous options. He refers to writings attributed to Chrysostom that said the darkness was caused by the sun withdrawing its rays, leaving, however, the movement of the heavenly bodies and the seasonal realities unchanged. He also refers to Jerome's belief that the sun withdrew its rays, and this miraculous phenomenon is the first candidate rejected by Aquinas.[42] This option is miraculous because Aquinas knows that

> this withdrawal of rays is not to be understood as though it were in the sun's power to send forth or withdraw its rays; for it sends forth its rays, not by choice but by nature.[43]

The Divine power would have to act in a special way to prevent these rays from leaving the sun. For Aquinas, this effective extinction of the sun is a distinct possibility, but happens not to be the correct explanation. At a more natural level, he rejects Origen's suggestion that 'many large and very dark clouds

were massed together over Jerusalem and the land of Judea.'[44]

Aquinas accepts the account given by Dionysius.* The darkness was caused by an eclipse, with the moon passing between Sun and Earth. This involved no merely natural event, but five stupendous miracles. Dionysius claims to have seen these miracles, and Aquinas accepts his 'eye-witness' testimony. The acceptance of this testimony raises issues to which we shall return in the discussion of Hume.

Turning to Aquinas' account of this testimony for miracle, we find that

> The first of these is that the natural eclipse of the sun by the interposition of the moon never takes place except when the sun and moon are in conjunction. Yet at that time the sun and moon were in opposition, it being the fifteenth day, since it was the Jewish Passover. And so he says, 'It was not the time of conjunction'.[45]

The miracles consist of the different aspects of the eclipse occurring when not the time of conjunction. In the first place, the moon must move, atypically, to the position of conjunction. The second miracle is in the moon's subsequent return to its proper place.

> The second miracle is that while at the sixth hour the moon was seen together with the sun in the middle of the heavens, in the evening it appeared in its place, that is, in the east, opposite the sun.[46]

So once more, the miracle lies in the abnormal motion of the moon: - 'For which reason he says, "And again we saw it", that is, the moon, "returned supernaturally to its place opposite the sun."' A third miracle occurs in the change of direction involved in commencing this eclipse, in

> that the eclipse of the sun naturally begins always on the western side of the sun and moves towards the east; and this is because the moon's proper movement from west to east is more rapid than the movement of the sun, and so the moon, coming up from the west overtakes the sun and passes it, going towards the east. But in this case the moon had already passed the sun and was distant from it by half the circumference of the heavenly circle . . . Therefore it

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*Aquinas cites Dionysius' Epistle to Polycarp. Ninian Smart refers to the collection of works 'thought to have been written by Dionysius the Areopagite, converted by St. Paul. St. Thomas Aquinas . . . regarded the authorship of the works as authentic. . . . It is now thought that the author lived around AD 500.' Ninian Smart (Editor), Historical Selections in the Philosophy of Religion (London: SCM Press Ltd., 1962), p. 50

> had to return eastward toward the sun, and came upon it from the east, and continue toward the west. That is why he says, 'Moreover, we saw the eclipse begin to the east'.[47]

The fourth miracle consists in the subsequent 'about-face' concluding the eclipse, since

> while in a natural eclipse the part of the sun which is first eclipsed is the first to reappear . . . in this case, however, the moon . . . having reached the western edge of the sun turned back toward the east so that the part of the sun which was occupied last was also the first abandoned.[48]

The fifth miracle is found in the conjunction lasting for three hours, as the moon and the sun adjust the pace of their passage, and synchronize their movement relative to one another.

We can suggest, at this point, one corollary of this belief. When Aquinas looked up at the moon in the thirteenth century, he believed that it had participated, miraculously, in the circumstances of the crucifixion. In fact, there is scarcely any thing in the world that remains untouched by the Incarnation of Christ, and miracle has shed its effects in all categories of creation. Certainly, his beliefs about the moon indicate that he was under no compulsion to suggest that the natal star was newly created. Its movement could as easily have been accounted for in the same way as this movement of the moon at the crucifixion. There is no suggestion that a second 'new' moon be created to leave the first moon in its regular orbit, and it seems that the newness of the star at the birth was to correspond with and signify the man newly created from the Virgin.

Somewhat conveniently for the argument, it seems that since no eclipse was expected at the time, 'the astronomers living then throughout the world were not inclined to look for one'.[49] However,

> In Egypt . . . where clouds rarely appear because of the stillness of the atmosphere, Dionysius and his companions were deeply moved to undertake the aforesaid observations about this darkness.[50]

Miracles in the heavens have a prominent role in indicating Jesus' Godhead. The stars and planets are at the upper limits of created reality, and it seems that they are immune to change that would be caused by anything at a lower level of reality. Aquinas cites Aristotle to the end that the planets and stars are by nature incorruptible and unchangeable.[51] Alterations to these heavenly bodies thus constitute the clearest sign of an agent acting from beyond all the heavens.

Nor should we overlook Aquinas' belief that it is Jesus, hanging on the cross, who is responsible for the miracle -

'The order of the seasons was not destroyed by the miracle which Christ worked.'[52] We have already referred to the man's instrumental activation of the power of God the Son through the primacy of his union with and existence in God. This miracle of the moon shows that the weakness of Jesus on the cross is an act of Divine condescension by God the Son, who is, at the same moment, deflecting the moon. It is thus an emblem of the power of the crucified one.

In this, there is a theological, though not a gravitational attraction between the fivefold moon miracle and the Magi's star. At his birth, the Incarnate Son is also helpless in the flesh.

> But it was necessary for Christ to demonstrate his divinity by miracles at that time especially when the weakness of his human nature was most apparent . . .
> But in his passion, the weakness of Christ's humanity was even more apparent. Consequently there was need for even greater miracles manifested in the most important lights of the world.[53]

Aquinas interprets Scripture as if the Evangelists said that the moon did these things. For him, God's power is limitless, and extends with ease over all created reality, and anything short of the logically impossible could happen.[54] In one sense then, we gain little by arguing that had he possessed better information about Dionysius, he would have rejected his testimony. Had Mark or Matthew said this, it would have raised no more problems for him than the sun standing still for Joshua, the birth star, or indeed the other suggestions that there was a miraculous 'extinction' of the sun as its rays were withheld.

Miracles worked on Man
Invisibility

Healing miracles have a greater goal than the restoration of health. They are subservient to the purpose of the Incarnation, namely, the salvation of man. Hence,

> It was fitting for Christ to demonstrate that he was the universal and spiritual Saviour of all by working miracles of healing for particular men.[55]

There is a distinction between the effect of the miracle as such, and this greater purpose. While it is necessary 'that the rational part of man achieve salvation . . . the illumination of wisdom and . . . justification', miracles of bodily healing need not achieve this, nor, in this respect, do they overpower a man against his will. 'Christ therefore justified man inwardly

by divine power, but not against man's will. Nor did this pertain to his miracles, but to the end of his miracles.'[56] But Jesus, by his Divine power, did work a number of miracles on the inward realm of man's will.

Amongst these miracles, Aquinas includes: Jerome's understanding of Jesus' authoritative call to be a disciple. On Matthew (9:9) 'He got up and followed him', he believes that 'the splendour and majesty of the hidden divinity which shone forth even in his human countenance' was the cause of the response. Similarly, of Matthew (21:12) where the buyers and sellers are driven from the Temple, we have a miracle of the 'radiating' of the otherwise hidden Divinity. 'A kind of heavenly fire flashed from his eyes, and the majesty of his divinity shone in his countenance.' He cites Origen to the end that 'this was a greater miracle than when he changed water into wine, for there he prevailed against inanimate matter, while here he tames the minds of thousands of men'. As a third example of this kind of miracle, he refers to Augustine on the armed crowd who fell back when coming to arrest Jesus. 'With one word . . . he attacked the crowd . . . drove it back, and struck it down: for God lay hidden in his flesh.' There is a final example of this kind of miracle that indicates the limits to which a non-problematical acceptance of the miraculous can take us. He accepts what he takes to be Augustine's interpretation of John (8:59) 'Jesus hid himself and left the Temple', where he concludes, 'He did not hide himself in a corner . . . but by his heavenly power, <u>making himself invisible</u> to those who lay in wait for him, he passed through their midst'.[57] (Italics mine)

These things, wrought with strong effect on those around him, are genuine miracles, and not merely things that have a rational, logical, persuasive effect on their minds. They bring about a kind of quantum-jump, or existential 'leap-in-being' in the recipients.

> From all these cases it is clear that Christ when he willed, by divine power worked changes affecting the souls of men, not only by justifying them and infusing wisdom, which pertains to the <u>end</u> of miracles, but also by outwardly drawing them to himself, or by terrifying or stupefying them, <u>which pertains to the miracles themselves</u>.[58] (Italics mine)

Healing miracles that involve physical contact between Jesus and the sick, are interpreted within the framework of the Incarnation. The Divine power works through the properties of Jesus' flesh, using them as its instruments. 'And so frequently

in healing the sick he not only used divine power, healing by way of command, but also by applying something which belonged to his humanity.'[59] It is not at once obvious why the command should be said to pertain directly to the Divinity, whereas the touch or saliva is apportioned to the humanity, for, at least, there is equally a human command uttered as well. The human voice is, perhaps, more immediately transparent to the Divine imperative.

> Thus, on the text, 'Laying his hands on each one he healed them', Cyril says, 'Although as God, he could by one word have driven out all diseases, yet he touched them, showing that his own flesh was capable of conferring the cure'. And on the text, 'Spitting upon his eyes and laying his hands on him', etc., Chrysostom says, '. . . wishing to show that his divine word, accompanied by action, works wonders: for the hand signifies action; the spittle signifies the word which comes forth from the mouth.'[60]

Instantaneous cures are the norm for the perfect power of God, so various 'moral' apologies are offered for the fact that the blind man is healed in two stages.

Miracles worked on Irrational Creatures
The Absence of Animal Miracles

We saw that there was a theological connection between the miracles in the heavens at Christ's birth and death. We would not be amiss to suggest that the moon miracle was formed as an extension of the miraculous to examples of all heavenly things, completing the display of Divine power, and indicating the universal significance of the one who had been born, and now was dying. That this is the outlook involved is indicated by Aquinas himself where he turns to miracles worked on the elements of creation that, unlike the stars, the moon and the sun, are beneath man on the hierarchy of being. Just as it was fitting for miracle to occur at every level of celestial reality, so it was fitting for miracle to extend its domain to all orders below.

> Now it pertains to the divine power to have every creature be subject to it. And so it was necessary for him to work miracles on every kind of creature, and not only on man, but also on non-rational creatures.[61] (Italics mine)

This leads to what must be, for us, a strange piece of apologetic, for it becomes necessary to account for the fact that Christ worked no miracles on brute animals. (The swine perishing was the work of the evil spirits.) No miracles are needed on the terrestrial animals, to display the sovereignty of God because what amounts to the same domain has already been mapped by the healing miracles wrought on the bodies of men and women.

> Generically brute animals are closely related to man, and for this reason they were created on the same day as man (Gen. 1:24). And because he worked many miracles concerning human bodies, it was not necessary for him to work any miracles concerning the bodies of brute animals; and this is all the more so because, as regards their sensible and physical nature, the same reason applies to both men and animals.[62]

I suppose that, had this familial relationship not existed, we could have expected miracles among the animals, as in the Old Testament, where Balaam's ass speaks to its master. But this would have shifted, somewhat, the emphasis in any entrance into Jerusalem.

The withering of the fig tree is an example of a miracle worked on a different order altogether. Aquinas is quite aware that Mark tells us that it was not the season for figs. With Chrysostom, we are not to raise questions of the justice or injustice of the act, but 'Look instead at the miracle and marvel at him who performed the miracle'.[63] The miracle is not to anyone's detriment, for the Divine Christ is using his creatures to promote the salvation of others. The scale of the miracle is increased because the fig is a tree full of moisture - it would have been a lesser miracle had it been worked on a species containing less sap![64]

Miracles extend into other realms of nature when Jesus rebukes the wind and the sea. These miracles in 'the air and the water' (aqua et in aëre) complete a quadrant of miracles worked by Christ. In the heavens, the air, the water, and the land. No doubt the underworld will be seen to between the death and the Resurrection.

Miracles are also worked on irrational creatures at the Passion. These miracles are all given a somewhat symbolic or typifying function.

> 'the veil was torn in two', to indicate the unlocking of the mysteries of the Law; 'the tombs opened', to indicate that by his death life would be given to the dead; 'the earth quaked and the rocks were split', to indicate that the stony hearts of men would be softened through his Passion, and that the whole world would be changed for the better.[65]

The feeding miracles are also miracles worked on irrational creatures, though here we may add that with the Cana miracle the matter is inanimate. The fish in these miracles are not living, as they were in the miracles of 'the superabundant catch' and the fish with the coin in its mouth. It is of some importance to Aquinas that the feeding miracles begin with <u>some</u> bread and <u>some</u> fish,

and that the food for the crowd is not simply created out of nothing.

> The multiplication of the loaves was not effected by way of creation, but by an addition of extraneous matter transformed into loaves.[66]

He does not identify this extraneous matter (extraneae materiae) but the distinction between creation and transformation seems to be significant.

> For which reason Augustine says, 'As he multiplied the harvests from a few grains, so he multiplied the five loaves in his hands'. But it is clearly by a process of transformation that grains are multiplied into harvests.[67]

Aquinas need not be saying more than that an end result is achieved in both cases, and that something already exists at the beginning and has the miracle worked on it. Neither he nor Augustine need be saying that the process of transformation is any kind of change that we could recognize as natural. Indeed, Jesus could have managed without any initial 'ingredients', whether bread, fish or other background stuff. 'In truth, he who does not need any material to work with could feed a crowd as easily with few or many loaves.'[68] In the feeding miracles and the Cana miracle, Jesus could have done the greater miracle of producing the items out of nothing, but it would have been didactically inappropriate.

> To make something from nothing is much greater and more marvellous than to make something from material already existing.[69]

But, it would not have been so believable. Using what exists condescends to man's capacities, shows against gnostics that what exists is good, and that doctrines supported or indicated by the miracle are continuous with ones that exist already.[70]

Spiritual Substances
Angels and Demons

We have already referred to the reality of the angels when speaking of the Nativity. Miracles with respect to the angels are considered somewhat inappropriate because men are to join them on their deliverance. It is, therefore, sufficient, that they appear at the birth, the Resurrection and the Ascension.[71] The demons, on the other hand, do not and will not know Christ in this way, but only by the temporal effects of his power. The devil never rises above a conjectural suspicion that Jesus is the Son of God, and his question 'If thou be the Son of God . . .' has an element of hypothesis about it.

> When the devil saw him weakened by his fast, he knew he was a real man: but when he was not able to overcome him by temptation, he began to wonder whether he was the Son of God.[72]

Bearing in mind what we have already said about the sense in which Jesus is the Son of God, we might suggest that for Aquinas, even the devil thinks in a Trinitarian fashion in the Gospels.

The End-point of the Miraculous in Jesus' Life

Resurrection

When we began to speak of miracle as a central reality, if not the framing category in which Aquinas set his understanding of Jesus, we spoke of the modal aspect of the miracle of conception and birth. It was of basic importance that God could be said to have been born of the woman, establishing the Incarnate condition from the moment of conception. This reality is again central to Aquinas' understanding of Jesus' Resurrection. It is the fulcrum for the somewhat miraculous fate of his human body and soul.

Jesus' death did not sever the hypostatic union of the Son with and in his humanity. Death meant the separation of his body and soul from each other, but both, in their division, remained united to the second person of the Trinity. 'Christ's divinity was not separated by death from either his soul or his flesh',[73] and so, the specific, instrumental power of God was accessible to his human state, even here.

> 'Through the power of the divinity united to it the body of Christ took up once more his soul which he had laid down, and his soul reassumed the body which it had left,'[74]

Considered apart from this union with God (ultimately, an abstract consideration), Jesus in his humanity was incapable of Resurrection.

That body and soul take up each other again raises issues of continuity, identity and transformation for Jesus, as he passes through death and enters this state. Aquinas says that 'it was necessary for a true resurrection of Christ that the same body be once more united to the same soul'[75] but 'same' does not seem to mean 'identical in all properties'. It does however mean, 'true body . . . of the same nature as before' and not an imaginary body.

There is an element of tension in the sense in which Christ's body is both the same and yet different in the Resurrection. We need to say something like, the same body was changed in all its properties, while remaining the same body. The reality of the change is manifested in the accounts of what Christ does in this bodily state, after the Resurrection. He entered amongst the disciples through closed doors (Jn 20:19). Aquinas allows that two explanations could be given here. Either, Jesus achieved this

as 'the result of the state of glory . . . as a consequence of the natural state of glorified bodies', or in some other way, though still through the basic reality of 'its union to the divinity'.[76]

Aquinas is not promoting something that he expects to be fully comprehended or accessible to the human intellect. He cites Augustine 'If this body which rose from the grave were the same as the body which hung from the cross, how could it enter through closed doors?' and gives his answer 'If you really understood this, there was no miracle, for faith begins where reason is deficient.'[77] Here, Aquinas is appealing to that aspect of miracle which does confute our reason and remain beyond its comprehension. He is not reducing the element of the miraculous by suggesting that thinking about the Resurrection in a particular way is going to render it a non-problematical reality of a rather commonplace sort. The sense of mystery is the same as we find in another reference that Aquinas makes to the writings of Augustine, this time, on the miracle of Jesus' origin.

> 'The same divine power which drew the infant from the virginal womb of the inviolate mother was also operating when Christ, in the fulness of his manhood, went through the closed doors. If we try to explain the miracle it will not be a miracle.'[78] (Italics mine)

It seems then that Christ's passage through the door has the character of a particular miracle. But to limit the action to that of specific miracle does not seem to do justice to the fact that this event seems to be appropriate to the state into which Christ has entered, and is not in fact miraculous with respect to it. It seems to be a natural act of Christ in his risen state. C. Thomas Moore refers to the proper attributes or qualities of the risen, glorious body, which could be displayed in this and similar acts of Christ after the Resurrection.

> The four endowments (dotes, marriage portions) of a glorified body according to Scholastic theologians are impassibilitas, as immunity from suffering or hurt; subtilitas, an absence of lumpish density; agilitas, a swiftness of response to spirit; and claritas or lightsomeness. . . . They are not to be regarded as miraculous, but as proper consequences of the bliss of the embodied soul.[79]

It seems somewhat restrictive to say they are not to be called miraculous because they are the proper consequence of the bliss of the embodied soul. The point is, that while they are appropriate to the new state into which Jesus has entered, as a whole that state and the properties and capacities exhibited of the one who has

entered it, seem miraculous with respect to the state which provided the point of departure.

It seems to me that one way of looking at Jesus' Resurrection here, is to consider it as a 'miraculization' of Jesus himself. It seems that he enters a state of 'self-miraculization' from which he does not return to normality as we know it. His passage into the room where the disciples are, is merely an example of what is normal to this condition, while the condition is itself miraculous when contrasted with the condition or mode in which the disciples live. Whether one uses the terms Resurrection, or immortalization or glorification or even miraculization, the idea seems to be that Christ's natural body and soul, his complete humanity, enters into a state that appears to exhibit something of the character of a permanent or enduring miracle, with respect to the initial state. The existence of this man as God, a reality from the conception, though not bringing about this distinctive and final effect until now, is central to Aquinas' understanding of the event.

> Christ rose to an immortal life of glory. Spirituality is a property of the glorious body . . . every bodily action . . . subjected to the will of the spirit. . . . Whoever, therefore, is endowed with a glorified body has within his power the ability to be seen or not to be seen as he wishes. Christ had this ability not only because of the state of his glorious body but also because of the power of his divinity . . . If Christ disappeared from the sight of his disciples . . . either it [his body] was no longer seen by them through his own willing it so, or else he departed from them through the property of a glorious body called agility. . . . Christ did not, however, appear to his disciples in a form characteristic of the state of glory. Just as it was in his power that his body be seen or not, so too was it in his power that his body appear as a glorious one, a non-glorious one, a mixture of both or any type whatsoever.[80]

It seems best, to me, to express this freedom with respect to the form of body in which to appear, by saying that Jesus has himself become a standing miracle with respect to the fixed relationship to a particular body normal to mortal existence.

Since the Resurrection is said to be due to the union of the humanity with God, Aquinas has to give an apology as to why Jesus did not possess a resurrection body from the conception itself.

> At the first moment of conception Christ's soul was glorious in the perfect enjoyment of divinity. It was by way of exception, therefore, that the glory of his soul did not overflow into his body. . . . As soon as the mystery of his passion and death was

> fulfilled and Christ's body was once more united to his soul, from his soul glory immediately overflowed into his body. Thus his was a glorious body.[81]

Hence Resurrection appears as something that brings his body into a state already possessed by his soul. Only for the purpose of passion and death was there an active restraint on the body, preventing it from entering the Resurrection mode before the time.

Once again, we can see the connection between miracle and Resurrection, as they both refer to the primary reality of Jesus' union with God. During his life, particular miracles are worked due to that union. His soul was glorious from its beginning due to that union with God in which it existed. At Resurrection, something 'flows' from the soul, in this union, to the body, which is then itself somewhat miraculized with respect to its former state.

Let us look more closely at the sense in which Christ's body is said to be 'miraculized'. When we discuss the feeding miracles, we shall see that the event is accessible to us at the starting point (bread), and at the end or terminal point where there is an abundance of bread. The miracle itself, the moment of change, however, transcends our knowledge of natural change and the properties of things involved in any change. From this perspective, we cannot even begin to say how the miracle came about. But we would not say that there is a miraculization of bread, because at the end, there is merely ordinary bread, only an abundance of it. In the Resurrection, the situation is somewhat different. We comprehend much of the initial state, in which a man (as we ourselves are persons) dies. As in the feeding miracle, we cannot comprehend any moment of change at which the Resurrection is brought about, for we are unfamiliar with human properties and powers that could effect such a thing, just as we cannot understand how any piece of baked bread becomes more bread besides. But, unlike the feeding miracle, the end of the event is not more of a product or thing that we simply comprehend as an item of natural reality. It is as if the intervening moment of mystery or miracle is stretched out and extended, and Jesus enters into a permanently miraculous state, or is miraculized. Thus Aquinas writes,

> But Christ once risen did not return to a manner of life which was open to the common knowledge of mankind . . . Christ's resurrection . . . transcended the common knowledge at both extremes: at the starting point when the soul returned from the underworld and his body from the sealed tomb, and at the term when he attained the life of glory. Therefore his resurrection should not have taken place in such a way as to be seen by men.[82]

He specifically contrasts Resurrection with the miracle of the restoration of Lazarus, and the difference is precisely in this end-state condition. Lazarus merely returns to normality.

Given this, the element of change, of transformation needs to be stressed in the following.

> Whatever properties belong to the nature of a human body were totally present in Christ's risen body. It is evident that flesh, bones, blood and other similar elements pertain to the nature of a human body. Therefore all these belong to Christ's risen body and they belong to it in a fully integral manner without any diminution whatsoever.[83]

Aquinas maintains that all these realities pertain to the Resurrection body, but they are not <u>simply</u> the same as before, when subject to the natural condition of mortality. There is a sense in which the flesh is quite different. Aquinas cites Augustine with approval;

> 'Perhaps given the presence of blood, a more bothersome adversary might press further in an embarrassing manner and state, 'If there was blood' in Christ's risen body, 'why not also pituitary glands' from which phlegm is produced? 'Why not also yellow bile' from the choleric parts of the body, 'and black bile' from the melancholic? 'Does not medical science itself affirm that the nature of human flesh results from the composition of these four humours? In reply to this argumentation, in addition to blood, you can add whatever you wish provided that you avoid anything which implies corruption . . . Thus you have the physical aspect of the body without any stain of corruption, movement without any fatigue, the ability to eat without need by hunger.' [84]

Here, there are a number of things mentioned that pertain to a state of existence miraculous with respect to the condition from which Jesus emerged. That this state is somewhat removed from 'normality' is further suggested in that though the apostles can offer eye-witness testimony for the event, what they see exceeds their powers of comprehension, and is thus different from other objects of sight for which they could offer testimony. Hence,

> Since men attain the beatific vision through that hearing which pertains to faith, so too they ultimately attained the vision of Christ risen from the dead only through the message they had first heard from the angels.[85]

<u>Aquinas' Amalgamation of the Resurrection Appearances</u>

Aquinas believed that Jesus manifested himself five times to the disciples on Easter Day, and then another five times before his final parting. Citing Augustine, he writes,

> In Augustine's exegesis on Easter Day Christ appeared five times: first of all, to the women at the tomb; secondly, to the women when they left the tomb; thirdly, to Peter; fourthly, to the disciples on the road to Emmaus; fifthly, to many of the disciples in Jerusalem in the absence of Thomas.[86]

The greater number of appearances on the first day was to establish their faith, which once established did not need so many appearances. Hence, we find only five more mentioned before the last.

> Christ appeared for the sixth time to his disciples when Thomas saw him. The seventh time was at the Lake of Tiberius during the episode of the catch of fish; the eighth, in Matthew's version, was on a mountain in Galilee. The ninth occurrence, according to Mark, was when he took his last meal with them for he was soon no longer to live with them on earth. The tenth appearance on that same day was the ascension.[87]

Aquinas notes John's reference to other non-recorded signs, and refers to Paul's reference to the appearance to the 500 brethren and to James, mention of which does not occur in the Gospels.

In fact, Aquinas amalgamates some of these notices, and uses Paul's reference here to dissolve ambiguities and differences across the Gospels. Paul's reference to the 500 witnesses, is taken to refer to the occasion intimated by the Evangelists under 'going before you into Galilee'.

> Christ appeared to the disciples hidden in Jerusalem on one or two occasions in order to console them. His appearance in Galilee was not carried out privately nor on one or two occasions, but was a mighty demonstration of power.[88]

The Ascension

There is a sense in which the Ascension adds little to the miraculous dimension introduced by the Resurrection. There is nothing more startling, nor qualitatively different in his going up from the earth, than there was in his first appearing to the disciples, in entering amongst them in the room, in disappearing at will.

The Ascension, as did the Resurrection, pertains to the man Jesus rather than to the assuming God as such. God neither comes or goes, if it is local motion from place to place that we are speaking of. He is 'able to come without moving from the place where he was, and to go without leaving the spot whence he came.'[89] Once again, Aquinas cites Augustine,

> You cannot grasp the Spirit as long as you persist in recognizing Christ only in the flesh, for although Christ's bodily presence left us, we have spiritually present Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.[90]

The Ascension involves the bodily 're-location' of Christ's humanity, for local motion 'cannot be a property of his divine nature which is immutable and not located in place',[91] and though it was the Divine Son who descended from heaven to be born in that humanity which is now ascending, that descent involved no local motion, but was kenosis[92] - an emptying in the sense of humiliation, rather than spatial evacuation. The Ascension indicates the permanent establishment of the proper 'proportion' between thing and place that pertains to a body no longer subject to mortality and death.[93]

Considered simply as a man, Christ lacked the capacity to go up like this. To the extent that he conformed to the likeness and limits of man, Ascension was an impossibility.[94] But the same primary realities, union with God, existence in God, glory flowing from soul to body, that account for all the miraculous aspects of his life, are called into play. 'A second principle of power derives from the glory endowing his human nature. Through this source Christ ascended to heaven.'[95] And, 'the primary source of Christ's Ascension to heaven is the divine power', but working via the instrumentality pertaining to the real, Incarnational union, just as previously, the man had willed the miracles and his Resurrection. Hence, 'He ascended to heaven by his own power, first of all by reason of his divinity, and secondly through the power of his glorified soul which moved the body as it willed.'[96]

Ascension is natural to Jesus' risen state. The question of the possibility of there being such a thing is hardly, therefore, one of whether the levitation of a heavier than air body is possible. The question, rather, is that of the specific qualities possessed by a resurrection body, and the actual identity of what has by now been transformed.

> For although such an ascension is contrary to the nature of a human body in the present state, in which the body is not under the rule of the Spirit, in a glorified state of the body there is nothing against nature or violent where the whole substance is under the sway of the Spirit.[97]

This does not, as we have seen from Aquinas' account of the reality of the Resurrection body, do away with those dimensions of it which we might presume to involve subjection to gravity, and being bound to the earth. But, it seems that the body is no longer subject to former limitations.

Even so, spatial and physical dimensions receive a nuanced treatment in the discussion of the goal, the terminal point

of the Ascension. Jesus ascends to the throne of God, but where is that? God's throne is not in the heavens, but rather, 'His throne contains the heavens'. The goal of Jesus' Ascension is literally indescribable, and resists the application of all spatial realities drawn from our human realm. Aquinas is offended by the suggestion that Christ literally sat at the right hand of the Father, with its corollary that the Father sits to the left of Jesus. He is offended by the very spatiality of the image, and so translates the spatial dimension into another mode. 'Right hand' is taken to mean a combination of three things: glory of the Divinity, happiness of the Father, and judiciary power.[98]

> For all eternity Christ remains incorruptible in the possession of that happiness which is the Father's. This is the meaning of the expression 'right hand'.[99]

as is 'the power which this man taken by God received'.[100]
It would have to be said, however, that Aquinas does not offer a translation into another mode of the local movement away from the earth. The more one stresses the identity of the Resurrection body with the pre-Resurrection body, the more 'spatial' the goal of the Ascension seems to become. Thus,

> A true resurrection was demonstrated with respect to Christ's body. Three proofs were offered: first of all, a body which was real and solid, not a phantom appearance or a ghost-like body as ephemeral as the air. . . . Secondly, Christ's body was presented as human, with genuine physical traits which could be seen by the eyes of men. Thirdly, Christ's body was numerically identical with his body before the resurrection; the wounds demonstrated this.[101]

Ultimately, I think the only way we can express this notion of Resurrection and the Resurrection body is to conceive of or imagine, not something being taken away from what was put in the tomb, but something being added to it. The Resurrection does not depend on any diminishing of the body, any escape from or abandoning of it, but on something being added to it which alters its characteristics and capacities. What is added is termed 'glory', and that term refers to something generated from and in the union of body and soul with the Divinity. It is even considered important enough for Aquinas to say of the blood that was shed by Jesus on the cross, that this too participated in the Resurrection and then Ascension;

> All of the blood which poured forth from Christ's body also rose with it. . . . all of those elements which are necessary for the truth and integrity of human nature also belong to this risen body.[102]

In asserting these things, Aquinas never betrays any hint that he does not know that these kinds of things are quite unlike what a man per se is capable of. Yet, he never senses that he is putting forward anything impossible or contradictory in an absolute sense. Always, the appeal is to the specific case in which union with God adds something to the capacities of Jesus in his humanity. What is added works either instrumentally, including all the human properties and qualities of this man, or else, by means of the 'miraculizing' of this man in his entirety at the Resurrection, when the union with God releases 'glory' into his total being. From beginning to end, miracle is the central and framing reality of Jesus in his existence, and as we have indicated, there are few restraints on what took place.

Accommodating the Literally Miraculous

As we have seen, Jesus not only works particular miracles during his life, but he himself is brought into existence by a miraculous conception, from which moment, his human existence is set in the ontologically prior reality of God who has added this human birth to his own eternal, timeless and perpetual generation or birth from the Father. Jesus' existence that develops from the Nativity is always set in that prior Nativity, and from this reality of union with God, he is able to will, effectively, all manner of things that exceed human powers. The end and goal of the human life is also couched in the miraculous, in that the body and soul enter into a state that is totally miraculous relative to the ordinary conditions of mortal life. The natural state of the risen Christ appears to those who see him, as marked by appearance and disappearance at will, passage through otherwise impermeable objects, and, at the final departure, a going up from the earth.

For Aquinas, Jesus' miracles begin with the Incarnation of God, and 'From what has been said it can be shown that God alone works miracles'.[103] God, of course, does not have to become incarnate in order to work miracles and neither is the working of miracles itself an indication that a man is an incarnation.[104] We referred earlier to the twin realities of mutual instrumentality operating between the humanity and the Deity of Christ; and to the union of the humanity and the Deity of Christ; and to the union of the humanity with the Divinity. An instrumentality of sorts could exist without the specifically incarnational unity, and God could certainly use a particular person as His instrument to effect a miracle without that person being united to Himself. Aquinas does discuss the differences between Jesus' miracles and the

genuine miracles of others. Jesus' miracles are said to be distinctive in three ways. In the first place, Aquinas stresses the scope and extent of his miracles, the wide-ranging impact of his healings and exorcisms which exceed the occasional or somewhat isolated miracles of other figures. In addition, being born of a virgin, rising from the dead and ascending into heaven are said to stand apart somewhat as miracles not attained by other men. More importantly, Aquinas stresses the fact that Jesus works his miracles by self-reference, to power that is truly his own, and not, as others do, by prayer to a God who is other than themselves. Thus,

> He evidently worked miracles as though by his own power, and not by praying, as others did. . . . it is shown that he was equally as powerful as God the Father . . . 'when any other man performed any of these works, he performed them together with Christ: whereas when Christ performed works, he performed them by himself'. . . . And in the same way, since the power to work miracles is proper to God alone, from any single miracle worked by Christ by his own power it is sufficiently shown that he is God.[105]

In the same place, Aquinas adds the fact of Jesus' self-referring teaching of his own Divinity, as the third factor that distinguishes Jesus' miracles from those of others.

Hence, while we may tend to approach the Gospels with a clear distinction between the miracles that frame Jesus' existence and the particular miracles attributed to him between the beginning and end points, this is a distinction that would not be urged too forcibly by Aquinas. It is always the same God who is responsible for miracles, even when, from a specific moment onwards, this man, instrumentally and by his union with God, participates in them and even initiates them as his own deeds.

While it is the same God responsible for all the miracles, the man is not equally involved in them all, since, the child can obviously not will his own conception, which is a pre-condition of his existence.

Though Aquinas always works with a clear recognition of the limits of human capacities, the possibility of there being miracles is never itself bound by this, as an appeal to God beyond all limits can be made.

> Every creature is placed under the order established in things by God. Therefore no creature can do anything above that order: which is to work miracles.[106]

We see here one of the central, if not the central issue in the discussion of the miraculous. The possibility of there being

miracles is directly connected to the concept of God that one employs, and in Aquinas' case, the reality of miracle in Jesus' life stands in a harmonious relationship with the appeal to a particular understanding of God, and how he was related to this man. For Aquinas, the historical world, physical and natural realms included, really contained this person with his Divine capacities, and the events done as a result of them being exercised. He is fully aware that were history or nature confined to the sum of things and events, lacking all reference to the transcendent reality of God, then miracles would indeed be impossible; beyond the capacities of any thing and incapable of being brought about.

But as we see below, such a history and nature is itself an impossibility to Aquinas. Such a nature would raise many more problems for Aquinas than any number of miracles. A nature thus confined to a mere sum of things, possessing no reference to or dependence upon God, would altogether cease to exist. There can be no world at all without God; and, with God, miracles are possible. So while in a nature limited to the sum of things, miracle would be impossible (since nature could not bring them about), such a nature could itself not exist, according to Aquinas. Where he writes,

> The highest degree in miracles comprises those works wherein something is done by God, that nature can never do: for instance, that two bodies occupy the same place, that the sun recede or stand still, that the sea be divided to make way for passers by [107]

he is clearly stating that without this specific God, these things could indeed never come about. This conclusion suggests that changes in interpretative response to apparent testimony for miracles may indeed be accompanied by, if not occasioned by, changes in belief about God. The process can of course work the other way too, and changes in belief about particular miracle stories might influence beliefs about the specific character and reality of God.

For Aquinas, it almost seems to be part of the definition of 'natural thing' that it remains open to acts of God that can change or alter it without regard to the specific properties it already possesses. While water is not wine, any water could become wine if God thought fit. While a donkey lacks a speech centre in the brain and the capacity to construct Hebrew or English sentences, if God wants it to, it will speak plainly.

> Now . . . God, in the original production of things, brought all things into being immediately by creation. Therefore he can cause an effect to result in anything whatsoever, independent of middle causes.[108]

and again,

> Neither, therefore, is it contrary to nature, that creatures be moved by God in any way whatsoever: since they were made that they might serve Him . . . whatever is implanted in a thing by God, is natural to that thing. Therefore if something else be implanted by God in that same thing, it will not be unnatural.[109]

Seen in this light, the apologist referring to the floating axehead was not making such a strange statement after all. If God wants an axehead to float, it will, and this will be natural to it. These accommodations of nature to the otherwise unnatural are able to be made because Aquinas has applied a maximal concept of power to the Deity. God is defined in such a way that nature can accommodate a moon that alters its course back and forth across the sky, a newly created star and a dove, a virgin giving birth, and so on.

> That which is done by the power of God, which, being infinite, is incomprehensible, is truly a miracle . . . Moreover, His power, being absolutely infinite, is not confined to any special effect, nor to the producing of its effect in any particular way or order.[110]

There is, however, a legitimate, internal tension in what Aquinas says, between a thing being impossible, and anything being possible by virtue of appeal to unlimited power. He does not lose sight of the sense in which miracles really are events that, ordinarily, cannot take place.

> These works that are sometimes done by God outside the usual order assigned to things are wont to be called <u>miracles</u>: because we are astonished (<u>admiramur</u>) at a thing when we see an effect without knowing the cause.[111]

It is not only a case of our being puzzled by a short-term or circumstantial ignorance of the cause involved, but there are also absolute miracles, or, as he puts it, miracles that are wonderful simply.

> Accordingly, a thing is wonderful simply, <u>when its cause is hidden simply</u>: and this is what we mean by a 'miracle': something, to wit, that is 'wonderful in itself' and not only in respect of this person or that. Now <u>God is the cause which is hidden to every man simply</u>: for we have proved above (Ch. XLVII) that in this state of life no man can comprehend Him by his intellect.[112] (Italics mine)

Let us examine an example of this appeal to a cause hidden simply, or absolutely; the appeal to the hidden God. We can

refer to the feeding or to the wine miracle. Referring to natural causality, and indicating his strong sense of the reality of the natural process and causes involved in making anything, Aquinas writes,

> These amount to the same: - the production of a work out of a subject; - the production of that to which the subject is in potentiality; - and the orderly production of something through definite intermediate stages. . . . Now every creature needs a subject in order to produce something: nor can it produce other than that to which the subject is in potentiality. . . . Therefore it cannot produce anything without bringing the subject to actuality through definite intervening stages. Therefore, miracles which consist in something being done without observing the order in which it is naturally feasible, cannot be worked by the power of a creature.[113] (Italics mine)

The feeding miracles and the wine miracle readily meet these conditions, indicating the necessity of the appeal to the limitless and hidden power of God to bring about the result in each case. An effective elimination of the appeal to God would automatically place the reality of the miracles in jeopardy.

In the first place, there is the strong sense of natural causality in the potential/actual distinction. Grain is potentially bread, given the correct subjects upon which it acts and which act upon it. Bread is an example of 'the orderly production of something through definite intermediate stages'. Given the potential of the grain to become, first flour, then dough, then the baked product, it must, given these circumstances, become bread. - 'nor can it produce other than that to which the subject is in potentiality.' - and 'it cannot produce anything without bringing the subject to actuality through definite intervening stages.'

The feeding miracle is never, then, thought to be possible because an alternative, intervening pathway of natural processes has been substituted. The miracle lies in there being no observable order, or pathway of processes by which the abundance of bread is produced. Bread does not stand in any relation of natural potentiality to more bread. It stands at the end of a process that began with the grain. It can only now be eaten or become stale. The miracle consists of the operation of the cause which is hidden simply, not in the intrusion or operation of an additional ingredient of any sort. God, as the hidden cause, is not introduced simply as a deus ex machina to work miracles.

All natural things in their native powers and properties

depend upon God, even as they interact with one another according to the somewhat fixed natures of what they are. The natural things that work together in the ordinary production of bread are all dependent on God, just as the miracles are said to be.

> Whatever applies an active power to action, is said to be the cause of that action: for the craftsman, when he applies the forces of nature to an action, is said to be the cause of that action; as the cook is the cause of cooking which is done by the fire. Now every application of power to action is chiefly and primarily from God. For active forces are applied to their proper operations by some movement of the body or soul. Now the first principle of either movement is God. For He is the first mover, wholly immovable . . .
>
> Likewise, every movement of the will whereby certain powers are applied to action, is reducible to God as the first object of appetite and the first willer. Therefore every operation should be ascribed to God as its first principal agent;.[114]

We can see, that though Aquinas has a high sense of the reality of causality, and its connection with the properties of things as they interact with one another, his concept of cause is completely adjusted to the possibility of there being miracles, events that lack preceding causal conditions in the things interacting. That is to say, his concept of cause is adjusted to his concept of God, in such a way that both miracles and the realities of causal interactions can occur. The reality and apparent coherence of this accommodation of causality to the miraculous indicates the element of subjectivity and hypothesis in <u>forming and using</u> a particular concept of cause. This is how the world really appeared to Aquinas, just as post-enlightenment thinkers perceive the world as rather more bound by the fixed dimensions of causal reality at the expense of the miraculous. But for Aquinas,

> From what has been said, we are able to consider a twofold order: the one, dependent on the first cause of all things, so that it comprises all; the other, a particular order, dependent on a created cause. The latter order is manifold, in accordance with the diversity of causes to be found among creatures. Yet one such order is subordinate to another even as one cause is subordinate to another.[115]

Aquinas' acceptance of the literally miraculous is always set amid what he believes about God and the ordinary, non-miraculous world, which is also His work. It is at this level of reflection that the potential for miracle is fundamentally built into the system.

> God is the cause of <u>every</u> thing's existence by His intellect and will. Therefore by His intellect and will, He preserves things in existence.[116] (Italics mine)

And again, citing Augustine, Aquinas writes,

> The potency of the Creator, and the power of the Almighty, and all-upholder, is the cause of every creature's subsistence. If this ruling power were withdrawn from His creatures, their form would cease at once and all nature would collapse. When a man is building a house, and goes away, the building remains after he has ceased to work and has gone: whereas the world would not stand for a single instant, if God withdrew his support. [117]

And once more,

> Since God not only gave existence to things when they first began to exist, but also causes existence in them as long as they exist, by preserving them in existence . . . so not only did He give them active forces when He first made them, but is always causing those forces in them. Consequently if the divine influence were to cease, all operation would come to an end. Therefore every operation of a thing is reducible to Him as a cause. [118]

For Aquinas then, there is no way in which a study of created realities in their causal propensities can rule out the miraculous. That every event, apart from miracles, has an immediate and real cause, presents no obstacle whatsoever to miracles being possible when it suits God's purposes. 'he can produce minor effects [bread] , that are [normally] produced by inferior causes [grain, flour, yeast, heat, baker], immediately without their proper causes'.[119]

Partial Appraisal

Aquinas is totally unembarrassed by even the most startling miracles. He accommodates them within the realm of history and nature, considering history and nature in such a way that miracles need not be excluded. Even so, their character as miracle is never distorted, since equally, he maintains a strongly developed sense of the reality of law and the limited powers of all things. Miracles are never explained, either in terms of the powers of things, or in the appeal to the unlimited power of God who works them. Miracle always remains mysterious, and possesses a reality of its own that resists interpretation in terms of non-miraculous factors.

There are few limits to the miraculous as it frames Jesus' existence. Miracles announce his dominance over all that exists, and this is most pronounced in the miracles of the sun and the moon, and the star, whereby they are subject in their motion to the one who is now incarnate.

Almost as a consequence of his ready acceptance of the miraculous as a genuine category of reality in its own right, we find him referring to miracles where we might not expect to find them. Two miracles in this group would be the reference to the dove at the baptism being a newly-created bird, and to Jesus

making himself invisible.

We have begun to see how miracle does not merely mark the beginning of Jesus' life, in the conception as such, but is a more extensive and unifying reality in that Mary is said to give birth to what is primarily God, though really man from this moment. Even her womb was the home of wonder as the unborn possessed many attributes in his humanity that were due to this union with God the Son.

Aquinas therefore raises the question of the degree of circumspection that is appropriate when confronted by the miraculous. If it is once admitted, it seems hard to limit the extent of what it will encompass. From his perspective, limiting them to a central, 'historical' section of Jesus' life would be woefully inadequate, as would any simple, seriatim recovery of a string of miracles attributed to him. These miracles are always set amid the greater miracle in which his identity is constituted.

Again, this maximal accommodation of miracle accompanied the belief that historical time in Jesus' life and liturgical time in the Church exactly corresponded with each other, and the belief that the four Gospels could be harmonized to form one, historically consistent, miraculous tableau of his life. Aquinas, it seems, has to travel little if any distance from the text to be amidst the genuine and total miracles of Jesus. The pragmatic and the miraculous histories coincide across the texts.

What Dionysius said he saw raises peculiar problems for the issue of accepting testimony for miracles. Hume would have rejected his testimony on the grounds of what he testified to, and that would have been an end of the matter. He could have also been cautious because of the lack of wider attestation when it might reasonably have been expected. Aquinas, had he known more about Dionysius, could have also rejected his testimony, as he rejected testimony for miracles from the apocrypha. But how disappointing this would have been, given that both the sun and the moon had stood still for Joshua (Joshua 10:12-13), which testimony could never be questioned, as Newman indicates even in the nineteenth century. Aquinas can cope quite well with the event as such, and one wonders if, literally, almost anything could happen and still present no problem for him. Had Mark or Matthew plainly said that this movement of the moon was responsible

for the darkness at the crucifixion, it would have created no difficulties for him.

This moon miracle seems to provide something of a 'control' example, and it does suggest that Hume was correct to say that there are some events for which we simply do best to dismiss all testimony regardless of the apparent calibre of the witnesses. That is not to say that all miracles fall within this 'automatic dismissal' class. It would, however, remain strange to say that Aquinas believed the right thing in theory, while Hume, had he considered it, would have disbelieved this miracle for the wrong reason, since Dionysius' testimony could have been trustworthy after all.

It remains significant that this moon miracle is, for Aquinas, a miracle that flows from the same Incarnational rationale as the rest of the miracles. With them, it is equally a work of Christ.

We saw in the discussion of miracles worked on irrational creatures that Aquinas offered an apology for the absence of miracles worked on land animals. He suggested that it was necessary for Christ to work miracles on 'every kind of creature', and we saw that there was a tendency to see miracle, (the display of God's power), extended to all levels of created reality; from the heavens above to the denizens of the seas. Aquinas here sees miracle as indicating the scope and reality of God's power in Christ extending to all levels of reality and features of the universe. (Paul, in Romans (8:38-39) similarly encompasses the whole range of created reality when he considers the universality and power of the love of God in Jesus Christ our Lord, from which nothing can separate the Christian.)

Miracle, once freely admitted into the study of the Gospel narratives, cannot remain an appendix to an inquiry carried on on substantially different principles. Once miracle is in, it takes over all terminologies and adjusts everything else to suit its own requirements. As we saw in the section Accommodating the Literally Miraculous, even Nature itself is virtually defined to be open to the possibility of miracle. Any particular thing could be changed into anything else by God's fiat. There is however more to God than absolute power, and in his wisdom and love, we find that we do not live in a world where things constantly

change in a miraculous manner.

The sum of Aquinas' beliefs about particular miracles, and his theological capacity to accommodate these miracles as literal events, presents us with the challenge of whether we, too, might adhere to his world-view or a variant of it, in which we accept even the greatest miracles. Miraculous events (like the movement of the moon, pp. 41-4) could be given a place alongside, amongst, or as the transformation of a natural state of affairs, by the immediate and unconstrained action of God. Via the instrumentality of Incarnation, the man Jesus could become responsible for many things otherwise beyond the natural limits of humanity.

But, in my opinion, it is partly this ready acceptance of miracle (the specific scope of which we have already outlined in this chapter), that provides a strong impetus to revise our own beliefs about how miraculous we can consider Jesus to have been. We have found a Jesus of such dominance and magnitude that, seemingly, he must have amounted to an overwhelming and convincing epiphany or revelation even as his life unfolded from the miracle-laden womb to the miracle-overshadowed cross and beyond. Given an alternative way of accounting for specific miracle stories, to be offered in chapters VI and VII, and the emphasis on non-response to miracle in Mark (chapter VIII), I believe that Aquinas, in his adherence to miracle, also provides us with sufficient material to shift our understanding of its significance; out of the domain of primary history or event, and into another aspect of reality. One might, however, try to maintain something of his world-view that accommodates miracles, and mount a defence of the historicity of central and in some ways uniformly attested miracles, like the feeding of the multitudes. In chapter VIII I show that even this would face many real obstacles.

CHAPTER III

NEWMAN: RESISTING RE-INTERPRETATION

Miracles of the Son of God and Their Limited Effect

The Centrality of Incarnation

In discussing Newman's conclusion that miracles are possible, and his beliefs about particular miracles, we do best to begin with the Incarnation and the place that it occupies in his thought. While, at first, we may not be able to give the precise sense in which the Incarnation is itself a miracle, it quickly becomes apparent that for Newman it accommodates and accounts for Jesus' capacity to work miracles, and removes any presumption against miracles occurring at other times and places.

As we found in our study of Aquinas, the Incarnation begins with, but is not the same as, the miracle of the virginal conception. From this moment, the modal miracle of the woman, Mary, bearing and giving birth to God, in the flesh, is a reality. It is called miraculous because a woman gives birth to what is primarily God, while the humanity of the One conceived is not at all discounted. Here, the capacity of Jesus to work all His future miracles is established, and at the same time, it is not denied that He really is a man.

It is appropriate, therefore, to begin by considering Newman on the Incarnation; beginning with the founding, concurrent miracle, and moving forward from that point. In so doing, we allow miracle to speak for itself as the central, decisive reality in Newman's thought about Jesus, and as a significant part of his all-embracing religious outlook. We find a clear example of what it means to admit the reality of miracle into historical and theological inquiry. We see miracle in its natural amplitude and rationality, as we follow Newman to the limits of what he in fact believed. He seems to say, 'Believe in the one miracle of Incarnation, admit it into your thought, and do not be too startled at what follows'.

> Catholics, then, hold the mystery of the Incarnation; and the Incarnation is the most stupendous event which ever can take place on earth; and after it and henceforth, I do not see how we can scruple at any miracle on the mere ground of its being unlikely to happen. No miracle can be so great as that which took place in the Holy House of Nazareth; it is infinitely more difficult to believe than all the miracles of the Breviary, of the Martyrology, of Saint's lives, of legends, of local traditions, put together; and there is the grossest inconsistency on the very face of the matter, for any one so to strain out the gnat and to swallow the camel, as to profess what is inconceivable, yet to protest against what is surely within the limits of intelligible hypothesis. If, through divine grace, we once are able to accept the solemn truth that the Supreme Being was born of a mortal woman, what is there to be imagined which can offend us on the ground of its marvellousness? . . . . . When we start with assuming that miracles are not unlikely, we are putting forth a position which lies embedded, as it were, and involved, in the great revealed fact of the Incarnation. [1]

His understanding of Incarnation as the primary miracle, generates his capacity to respond to miracles wherever they are alleged to occur, and in whatever form they take. That miracles can, and have in fact occurred, with their own centre in Incarnation, will play an important part in the evaluation of testimony for any particular wonder or providence.

Conception without a human father marks the beginning of the Incarnation. In his sermon of that name, Newman refers to the Word, who, 'was from the beginning the only-begotten Son of God. Before all worlds were created, while time as yet was not, He was in existence . . . God from God,' [2] - this Word enters our world from that moment of miraculous conception. From that moment, Mary becomes the mother of God.

> Mary, His mother, was a sinner as others, and born of sinners; but she was set apart . . . to yield a created nature to Him who was her Creator. Thus He came into this world, not in the clouds of heaven, but born into it, born of a woman; He, the Son of Mary, and she (if it may be said), the mother of God. Thus He came, selecting and setting apart for Himself the elements of body and soul; then, uniting them to Himself from their first origin of existence, pervading them, hallowing them by His own Divinity . . . the while they continued to be human, . . . [3]

An ontology is implemented in which references to God and references to man have a common locus in this one case. Here, all tendencies to divide the divine and the human must be resisted. The modal miracle of the woman giving birth to God must not destroy the reality that a real baby is born. Neither is the child born, properly accessible and capable of being described in human terms alone.

Newman is, however, concerned to defend the reality, if not the primacy, of the divinity of Jesus. In his Lenten sermon, 'Christ the Son of God made Man', he writes

> 1. First, Christ is God: from eternity He was the Living and True God. . . . it is expressly stated, and that by Himself, in the Gospel. He says there, 'Before Abraham was, I am (Jn viii.58):' by which words He declares that He did not begin to exist from the Virgin's womb, but had been in existence before.[4]

This passage also shows clearly, the extent to which he believes that the Fourth Gospel contains the reminiscence of Jesus' utterances. As 'Son of God', Jesus is God, and

> The great safeguard to the doctrine of our Lord's divinity is the doctrine of His Sonship; we realize that He is God only when we acknowledge Him to be by nature and from eternity Son.[5]

There is a familiar reference to the miraculous conception as the means by which human sinfulness was avoided in this case. 'He came by miracle, so as to take on Him our perfection without having any share in our sinfulness.'[6] And as in Aquinas, we find similar references to feasible but less preferable modes of His appearing from Heaven. 'He might have taken on Him a body from the ground, as Adam was taken; or been formed, like Eve, in some other divinely devised way.'[7] But Newman is not simply a nineteenth-century duplicate of Aquinas.

Incarnation and Scripture

Newman appears to work with a number of distinctions between different levels of response to Jesus; issues that are not at all apparent in the life of Christ that we trace in the Summa. Newman begins to accommodate differences between Jesus in his actual, or pragmatic history, Jesus as re-presented in the Gospels, and then again, in the dogmatic clarifications of the Church. For example, where we have been referring to the modal miracle of Incarnation, and its enduring reality, Newman can write,

> 3. The doctrine of the Incarnation, or the Gospel Economy, as embracing the two great truths of the Divinity of Christ and the Atonement, was not (as far as we know) clearly revealed, during our Lord's ministry.[8]

Moving from 'our Lord's ministry' to the Gospel texts, we find a similar potential for a number of differing responses to what is written.

> . . . so that on the whole, I think, even the Scripture evidence for the divinity of Christ, will be found in fact as little to satisfy the captious mind, when fairly engaged to discuss it, as that for infant baptism, great as is the difference in the evidence for the two.[9] (italics mine)

Newman appears to acknowledge the fact that there is a significant distinction to be made between Jesus' life, and its depiction in the Gospels; even before we go on to address the task of correctly interpreting these texts. In The Miracles of Early Ecclesiastical History, he wrote,

> The actual course of the events which Scripture relates is one thing, and the course of the narrative is another; for the sacred writers do not state events with that relative prominence in which they severally occurred in fact. Inspiration has interfered to select and bring into the foreground the most cogent instances of Divine interposition . . . [and], it has covered up from us the 'many other signs' which 'Jesus did in the presence of His disciples, . . . [10]

But having granted this much, Newman never continues to the point where the slightest doubt about the occurrence of the specific miracles is permitted to endure. Jesus' pragmatic history will in fact contain the wonders reproduced in the form appropriate to the Gospels. Turning then to the correct interpretation of what is encountered in the Gospels, we find that Newman looks outside of the texts to find a precise expression of what otherwise might remain ambiguous or amenable to a number of different responses. Here, we find that Newman emphasises the ecclesial nature of interpreting the Scriptures.

> . . . I ask again, Where is there any promise that we, as individuals, should be brought by His gracious influences into perfect truth from merely employing ourselves on the text of Scripture by ourselves? [11]

There can even be said to be a tension between what the Gospels appear to say, and what they can in fact be understood to be saying from the vantage point of settled ecclesial judgements. This holds for the miracle of Incarnation itself.

> Again: the first three Gospels contain no declaration of our Lord's divinity, and there are passages which tend at first sight the other way. Now, is there one doctrine more than another essential and characteristic of a Christian mind? Is it possible that the Evangelists could write any one particle of their records of His life without having this great and solemn truth stedfastly before them, that He was their God? Yet they do not show this. It follows that truths may be in the mind of the inspired writers, which are not discoverable to ordinary readers in the tone of their composition. I by no means deny, that now we know the doctrine, we can gather proofs of it from the three Gospels in question . . . but no one will say it is on the surface, and so as to strike a reader. I conceive the impression left on an ordinary mind would be, that our Saviour was a superhuman being, intimately possessed of God's confidence, but still a creature: - an impression infinitely removed from the truth as really contained and intended in those Gospels. [12] (italics mine)

But the issues involved in interpreting a Gospel are not confined to this one alone. There will be a number of ways in which 'It follows that truths may be in the minds of the inspired writers, which are not discoverable to ordinary readers in the tone of their composition.'[13] For example, Newman writes concerning the sense that the Christian may want to give to 'Messiah' on encountering it in a Gospel, as distinct from someone concerned to set its meaning strictly by reference to other sources of the milieu and tradition. He writes,

> The Old Testament certainly does speak of the Messiah as a temporal monarch, and conqueror of this world. We are accustomed to say that the prophecies must be taken spiritually; and rightly do we say so. True: yet does not this look like an evasion, to a Jew? [14]

Newman adopts as part of his outlook the fact that a specific use by the early Christians of Old Testament passages will not simply repeat or put forward a sense that would remain within the explicit or literal domain of the original passage. Furthermore, he approves not only of the extent to which the minds that formed the New Testament did this, but also, of the later activity of the Church where it made similar interpretative responses to the Gospels.

> The doctrines of the Church are not hidden so deep in the New Testament as the Gospel doctrines are hidden in the Old; but they are hidden; and I am persuaded that were men but consistent, who oppose the Church doctrines as being unscriptural, they would vindicate the Jews for rejecting the Gospel . . . That Gospel . . . was a stumbling block to them, as for other reasons, so especially because it was not on the surface of the Old Testament.[15]

Once again, we could note his recognition that 'Son of God' admits of half-a-dozen meanings, and that it requires a certain labour to apportion the correct sense in each place, according to who is using the term. This even leads him to say that Peter knew in which sense Jesus was the Son of God, while the Centurion, who acknowledges Him as such, does not;[16] a conclusion that would require considerable defence against a plain reading of Mark, (where Peter never refers to him as Son of God).

The realization that to speak of the Incarnation of the Son of God is to utilize a doctrinal resolution of matters seemingly less accessible on the surface of Scripture, and perhaps not given at all during His actual life, must affect our response to miracle in that life and in its inspired re-presentation in the Gospels. It will affect our response to the specific miracle at Jesus' human beginnings, to the modal miracle of Incarnation, and to the particular wonders attributed to Him. We might even expect that Newman is about to

develop a radical critique of the place of miracle in the Christian religion.

The Hiddenness of God the Son

To begin, the One conceived lives a hidden life in outward conformity to the world. Newman allows that nothing at first noticeable or startling follows from the miracle of origin, and even when He begins His ministry as an adult, those nearest Him (Newman seems to exclude Mary here) have no belief in, nor comprehension of His purposes. It seems as if little discernible result flows from the miracles that frame this lowly man.[17]

It is here that Newman begins to question the effect of miracles and their seeming incapacity to bring about any significant change in the perceptions and outlook of those who encounter them. Newman works with a distinction between being in the discernible presence of Jesus, and the further reality of recognizing that you are in the immediate presence of the Son of God - (i.e., of God the Son). Miracles do not of necessity effect the link between these two realities that are in fact one in the mystery of Jesus' person.

> We should not have known He was present; and if He had even told us who He was, we should not have believed Him. Nay, had we seen His miracles (incredible as it may seem), even they would not have made any lasting impression on us. . . . consider only the possibility of Christ being close to us, even though He did no miracle, and our not knowing it; yet I believe this literally would have been the case with most men.[18]

And in a startling passage, Newman considers the heights to which failure to comprehend God when in the immediate presence of Jesus can go, as the totally-hidden God suffers in the one crucified.

> Could men come nearer to God than when they seized Him, struck Him, spit on Him, hurried Him along, stripped Him, stretched out His limbs upon the cross, nailed Him to it, raised it up, stood gazing on Him, jeered Him, gave Him vinegar, looked close to see whether He was dead, and then pierced Him with a spear?[19]

Miracles, as recorded, do take place at the crucifixion,[20] but they do not overthrow His real obscurity. Neither do they nor the greater miracles of Easter yet to come, transform the life of faith for the believer in Newman's time, so that this basic hiddenness of the Son of God is overcome or dispensed with.

> Next, if He is still on earth, yet is not visible (which cannot be denied), it is plain that He keeps Himself still in the condition which He chose in the days of His flesh. I mean, He is a hidden Saviour . . . He is here, and again He is secret; and whatever be the tokens of His Presence, still they must be of a nature to admit of persons doubting where it is; . . .[21]

Newman then sees the Presence of God hidden in the poor, the afflicted and the defenceless of his own day. And Jesus' own condition is not totally removed from this modality of Presence, by His miracles. Neither does the Trinitarian change in the Person of God now present to the believer, the Holy Spirit 'rather than' the Son, substantially overthrow or modify the hiddenness of God as present to the world. In the last-mentioned reference, Newman explicitly sets his remarks within his Trinitarian conception of God. God, whether incarnate in the life of Jesus, or present in the world as Holy Spirit, is always as hidden, even as 'incognito' as He was in that life.[22]

It seems to me that there is a tension between this response to Jesus as an ambiguous sign of God's presence, and His portrayal as surrounded by the greatest miracles. As we shall see, Newman's perception of this curious ineffectiveness of apparently overwhelming prodigy, never affected his capacity to judge that all the miracles were literal realities. It does become hard to see how one described in the following terms can amount to anything less than an irresistible epiphany.

> Thus all that He did and said on earth, was but the immediate deed and word of God the Son acting by means of His human tabernacle. He surrounded Himself with it; He lodged it within Him; and thenceforth the Eternal Word, the Son of God, the Second Person in the Blessed Trinity, had two natures, the one His own as really as the other, divine and human; and He acted through both of them, sometimes through both at once, sometimes through One and not through the other . . . He was as entirely man as if He had ceased to be God, as fully God as if He had never become man, as fully both at once . . . [23]

Far from amounting to an overwhelming epiphany, it seems that Jesus as framed by miracles, amounts to something rather more modest, if not limited, in scope. It seems that the miracles will not have this function. Juergens summarizes the role that Newman allows for them.

> Why then were miracles wrought? Newman does not deny the value of miracles as evidence for Christianity. He insists only, and quite repeatedly as well as forcibly, that they are not the chief motive of credibility; that they are even not necessary; that they can easily be replaced; that a person must be already very much inclined to accept the doctrine to which they pretend to witness; nay, that many of those very miracles, e.g. of the Old Testament, need the support of faith rather than that faith is supported by them. [24]

Ineffective Miracles

Non-response to miracles and their mysterious ineffectiveness is the central theme of Newman's sermon 'Miracles No Remedy for Unbelief'. Here, he discusses the seeming non-effect of the Exodus miracles, and, we may anticipate, this theme surely has a bearing on the issue of non or partial response to miracles in Mark. Of Israel in the Exodus he writes,

> It seems strange, indeed, to most persons, that the Israelites should have acted as they did, age after age, in spite of the miracles which were vouchsafed to them. The laws of nature were suspended again and again before their eyes; the most marvellous signs were wrought at the word of God's prophets, and for their deliverance; yet they did not obey their great benefactors at all better than men now-a-days who have not these advantages, as we commonly consider them.[25]

Strange as this may be, it does not cause Newman to consider that miracle itself may in fact function in the Scripture at a level other than one dependent on straightforward occurrence. And to us, issues of inappropriate response to miracle cannot be limited to Christ's opponents, as could be suggested by this reference to John.

> At last He sent His well-beloved Son; and He wrought miracles before them still more abundant, wonderful, and beneficent than any before Him. What was the effect upon them of His coming? St. John tells us, 'Then gathered the Chief Priests and the Pharisees a council, and said, What do we? for this man doeth many miracles . . . Then from that day forth they took counsel together for to put Him to death (John xi.47.53.)'.[26]

Newman's insistence that Johannine uniqueness of the raising of Lazarus is a problem that can be overcome (see p. 91 below) only begins to touch on the issues raised by this miracle.

Newman reaches conclusions about miracles that one might expect would lead to a re-appraisal of the importance of any insistence on their occurrence, if not to a re-appraisal of beliefs about whoever it is that is said to work them. In a sequence of exerpts from this sermon, we find a uniformly negative, if not cautionary, attitude towards them.

> In matter of fact, then, whatever be the reason, nothing is gained by miracles, nothing comes of miracles, as regards our religious views, principles and habits. Hard as it is to believe, miracles certainly do not make men better; the history of Israel proves it. . . .
>
> . . . if the Israelites had a common nature with us, surely that insensibility which they exhibited on the whole, must be just what we would exhibit on the whole under the same circumstances. . . .

> . . . after all, the difference between miracle and no miracle is not so great in any case, in the case of any people, as to secure the success or account for the failure of religious truth. It was not that the Israelites were much more hard-hearted than other people, but that a miraculous religion is not much more influential than other religions. [27]

Newman concludes by limiting, not what may occur, but the effect of the most startling things on the mind. If to say 'startling' already includes the dimension of human response, we could better say, Newman still allows that God can do anything, even 'write His Gospel on the Sun' (p. 81) but says that it may well be to no effect. People unmoved by God when there are no miracles are unlikely to be moved when there are. And as we began to see, the ordinary tokens of God's presence are said to be in the powerless, the poor, the weak, and in what is of no account in the world. It seems that from His human origin in the womb of His mother and persisting into Newman's own time, He has ordained always,

> . . . the standing symbol of His Body and Blood under visible symbols, that He may secure thereby the standing mystery of Omnipotence in bonds. [28]

Given that in his wider work, Newman mounted a comprehensive and highly flexible defence of the belief that <u>all</u> the miracles of Scripture, (and not just those of the New Testament) really took place, it becomes difficult to see what he thereby hopes to gain by them. For the more one magnifies them for what they seem to be, displays of the limitless power of God, the more difficult it becomes to reconcile them with this enduring reality of bondedness, with the hiddenness of God in Jesus, and the non-response if not antipathy of those who experience them. Given the mounting attacks on the miracles of the Old Testament, the New Testament and in Church history, it is strange to see the lengths to which he goes to defend them <u>all</u>.

It is interesting to consider J.D. Holmes' conclusions on the capacity to find in Newman a momentum that seemed to be leading to a new way of responding to miracles. Of the Tract 85 material he writes,

> . . . the argument itself was a 'sceptical' one in which Newman possibly overstates the position and which did not necessarily represent his own opinions about scripture. Nevertheless, the argument demonstrates or illustrates Newman's confident awareness of the difficulties, limitations and human elements in the sacred writings. In Tract 85 and other early writings, <u>Newman accepted the possibility of distinguishing between the results of biblical criticism and the truth of the Christian religion</u>. [29] (italics mine)

His later writings indicate how little ground he conceded on the issue of the occurrence of any miracle referred to in Scripture. Unlike Strauss, he seems not to have been struck by the tension in the Gospels between the portrayal of Jesus' disciples as witnessing the most amazing things, their being told in advance of His Resurrection - and their total unpreparedness for this when it happens. At this point, miracle does seem to work at a level other than that of simple historical reality, and may even suggest that the element of historicity should be re-examined.

Newman's Definition of Miracle: Establishing The Context of Inquiry

Miracles as Normative in the Complete Context

Newman considers a miracle to be

> . . . an event inconsistent with the constitution of nature, that is, with the established course of things in which it is found. . . . an event in a given system which cannot be referred to any law, or accounted for by the operation of any principle, in that system. It does not necessarily imply a violation of nature . . . merely the interposition of an external cause, which, we shall hereafter show, can be no other than the agency of the Deity.[30]

While Newman stresses that miracles are inconsistent within a given system, namely the realm of nature and its laws, he is equally insistent that this domain be set in a wider framework. Given this wider context, what appears to be, and is in fact an inconsistency in the natural realm, is more accurately described as a normative exhibition of principles of the complete system: 'while they are exceptions to the laws of one system, they may coincide with those of another'.[31] Providence, the plans and provisions of the Divine Mind, especially in His intentions towards man and his state, must be considered when these otherwise anomalous events are discussed. To confine the discussion to one of irregularities within the physical order is to

> . . . degrade them from the station which they hold in the plans and provisions of the Divine Mind, and to strip them of their real use and dignity; for as naked and isolated facts they do but deform an harmonious system.[32]

When we discuss Hume's beliefs about miracles, we shall see that this difference in the moral and providential context of inquiry is one of the principal points of disagreement between the two. They differ over the reality and accessibility of these 'framing' certainties about God and His purposes. Newman looks to this

context to provide miracle's proper rationale and vindication: Hume re-describes this context so that no independent or semi-independent knowledge of God is permitted. One always has to come cold, as it were, to testimony for what can only remain bizarre in the permitted context of inquiry. Newman looks to a wider consistency or coherence, where miracles will not be disruptive intrusions, but normative exhibitions.

> Since a Miracle is an act out of the known track of Divine agency, as regards the physical system, it is almost indispensable to show its consistency with the Divine agency, at least, in some other point of view; if, that is, it is recognised as the work of the same power.[33]

Newman has referred to the interposition of a cause external to the natural system, and to the sense in which nothing within that system can account for the event in question. Here, he is responding to the same aspect of miracle that we have encountered in Aquinas' theology. There, the miraculous event was said not to come about as the result of any causal properties or potentialities of a thing, but God, the Highest Cause and Supreme Power, invisible and unseen, above and beyond the things of nature, acts to modify these things directly or immediately. By this act, things are modified in a way that exceeds their natural capacities, and events occur that would otherwise be impossible. But as these natural capacities, in fact, the things in their completeness, are totally and really dependent on God for their existence, He is said to be free to act in this new way, and it is in a sense natural for things to be thus acted upon. Newman refers to miracles as

> . . . those events . . . which have no assignable second cause or antecedent, and which, on that account, are from the nature of the case referred to the immediate agency of the Deity.[34]

Recourse to a Partially-known God

For Newman, to appeal to this Deity is never to appeal to a totally unknown 'X' that remains beyond the capacities of human experience, knowledge and faith. Nor is it to appeal to an 'X' whose sole functionis to vindicate particular beliefs about miracles. Newman begins any inquiry into miracles with certainties about God already established, and on bases that are at least semi-independent of the testimonials in question. These certainties mark the starting point and context of inquiry into the miracles. While they do not diminish the need for good, historically-sound testimony for the events under consideration, they do spread the burden of proof somewhat. First of all, this contextual issue of

a partially-known God maintains that there is One with the power to work the miracle. Secondly, it provides the reason or purpose for the event taking place.

Newman places as much importance on his contextual certainties as he does on the particular miracles in question. Fundamental revision of the theistic context would have to lead to, if not occur in tandem with, basic changes in the response to miracle-reports.

> . . . the being of an intelligent Maker has been throughout assumed; and, indeed, if the peculiar object of a Miracle be to evidence a message from God, it is plain that it implies the admission of the fundamental truth, and demands assent to another beyond it. His particular interference it directly proves, while it only reminds of His existence. . . . Hence, though an additional instance, it is not a distinct species of evidence for a Creator from that contained in the general marks of order and design in the universe. . . . A miracle is no argument to one who is deliberately and on principle, an atheist.[35]

But Newman does not adopt a naïve attitude towards the acquisition of this basic knowledge of God. Though it is said to be accessible apart from the miracles in question, and functions as a pre-condition of inquiry into reports of miracles, he never says that knowledge of this God can be uniformly presumed. There are a number of factors at work which make the appeal to God in the inquiry into miracles, a move that never will in fact be allowed by all inquirers. Even from the perspective of his own belief in this God, we can choose two places where the problematic of belief in God is clearly raised. His remarks in his second essay, on Ecclesiastical miracles, are applicable here. (They also address aspects of the issues raised by the emergence of evolutionary theories,[36] and what it would then mean to refer to a fundamental knowledge of God from the order of nature.)

> To persons who have not commonly the opportunity of witnessing for themselves this great variety of Divine works, there is something very strange and startling, - it may even be said, unsettling - in the first view of nature as it is. . . . the mind loses its balance, and it is not too much to say, that in some cases it even falls into a sort of scepticism. Nature seems to be too powerful and various, or at least too strange, to be the work of God . . . and if we do not submit ourselves in awe to His great mysteriousness, and chasten our hearts and keep silence, we shall be in danger of losing our belief in His presence and providence altogether.[37]

Or, we might refer to the following exerpt from the Apologia Pro Vita Sua.

> Starting then with the being of God, (which, as I have said, is as certain to me as the certainty of my own existence,

> though when I try to put the grounds of that certainty into logical shape I find a difficulty in doing so in mood and figure to my satisfaction,) I look out of myself into the world of men, and there I see a sight which fills me with unspeakable distress. The world seems simply to give the lie to that great truth, of which my whole being is so full; [38]

This potential for initial, and perhaps irreconcilable differences over the issue of God's existence, directly affects the inquiry into miracles. A context in which there is said to be one with the power and motive to work miracles will provide a very different antecedent probability or expectation concerning the kinds of event that could be encountered. This would apply to an expectation of events as yet in the future, as it would to the evaluation of testimony for miracles in the past.

Newman's moral experience led him to believe in a God whom he was able to identify as the God of the miracles. There was in fact an approach to the same Being by two semi-independent avenues; one by means of his conscience and his understanding of its significance, the second by means of the historical deposit in which the miracles of Jesus figure. Juergens maintains that 'Wherever Newman begins an analysis of the evidence of faith he takes conscience as the starting point'. [39]

Conscience may be the starting point, but this does not mean that Newman settles <u>all</u> the issues of faith by recourse to it alone. Faith has a number of aspects, amongst which is the historical dimension concerned with Jesus in the Gospel records, and their maintenance and interpretation in the church. Where Newman refers to faith and belief, in the following, it seems to me that he implicitly assumes the literal reality of the miracles attributed to Jesus in the Gospels. Any change in belief about their historicity would lead to a change in what he would mean by 'faith'.

> The principle of <u>faith</u>, which is the correlative of dogma, being the absolute acceptance of the divine Word with an internal assent, in opposition to the informations, if such, of sight and reason. . . . That belief in Christianity is itself better than unbelief; that faith, though an intellectual action, is ethical in its origin; that it is safer to believe; that we must begin with believing; [40]

'Beginning with believing' is not, for Newman, to promote arbitrary subjectivism as the starting point, neither in the life of conscience, nor in inquiry into any historical grounds of faith.

We have referred to Newman and Hume differing over the context of inquiry into miracles. An important issue that emerges from this contextual difference concerns the amount and quality of evidence required for a proper belief that a miracle has in fact occurred. Hume, developing some notions of Locke on the effect

of intrinsic differences in kinds of event, on the capacity of testimony to be accepted, maintained that a point of no return was passed, beyond which no good grounds existed for allowing that the event in question had, or could have, happened. Intrinsic unlikelihood would always counter otherwise impeccable testimony. Newman's contextual emphasis frees particular testimony from this burden by re-apportioning it to the theistic context. Testimony for miracles need not be of an impossibly higher calibre than we would ask of testimony for some other important event. It will turn out that there can be acceptable testimony to some very strange events indeed.

> We are not left to contemplate the bare anomalies, and from the mere necessity of the case to refer them to the supposed agency of the Deity. . . . it is hardly too much to affirm that the moral system points to an interference with the course of nature, and that Miracles wrought in evidence of a Divine communication, instead of being antecedently improbable, are, when directly attested, entitled to a respectful and impartial consideration.[41]

When considered in the allegedly proper and complete context, obstacles to accepting testimony for what appear to be grossly anomalous events are overcome. As the miracle now possesses a normative force in the wider perspective, its apparent capacity to dissipate the effect of testimony offered is itself ameliorated.

> . . . it is as parts of an existing system that the Miracles of Scripture demand our attention, as resulting from known attributes of God, and corresponding to the ordinary arrangements of His providence. . . . they are connected to us not as unmeaning and unconnected occurrences, but as holding a place in an extensive plan of Divine government, completing the moral system, connecting Man and his Maker, and introducing him to the means of securing his happiness in another and eternal state of being.[42]

Whatever expectations of a revised approach to miracles were formed by the earlier collation of Newman's responses to their non-effect, we do not in fact find a revised approach to the subject - one that moves beyond the scope of belief in the occurrence of the Scriptural miracles. Even by the late work, An Essay In Aid of a Grammar of Assent (1870), we find Newman referring to a fundamental identity between Jesus as He was and Jesus as He appears in the Gospel. Combining this with his understanding of the proper context for inquiry into miracle, a very conservative outcome is inevitable. For example, we can consider Newman's beliefs about Jesus and His use of the titles 'Son of God' and 'Son of Man'. This shows that

even by 1870, he attributed little to any 'creativity' of the Evangelists, and little to any determinative influences apart from Jesus Himself.*

> Another striking instance of this is seen in the Names under which He spoke of Himself . . . He . . . chooses as His special designations these two, Son of God and Son of Man . . . by which He corrects any narrow Judaic interpretation of them . . . In those two names, Son of God and Son of Man, declaratory of the two natures of Emmanuel, He separates Himself from the Jewish Dispensation in which He was born, and inaugurates the New Covenant. . . . In quoting His own sayings from the Evangelists for this purpose, I assume (of which there is no reasonable doubt) that they wrote before any historical events had happened of a nature to cause them unconsciously to modify or to colour the language which their master used.[43] (Italics mine)

We have seen that Newman did believe that there were differences between Jesus' life, and its re-presentation in the Gospels. But these differences are contained within a direct or mimetic understanding of the Evangelists' tasks. There is, in fact, a 'direct overlap' between event in Jesus' life and event in the narrative. Differences seem to be confined more to the manner of presentation, to the compression, or condensing required for the purposes of the narrative form. This approach to the Gospels augments and completes the contextual issues referred to, and leads to his conservative conclusions about what Jesus really did.

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*By contrast, Wilhelm Bousset, Kyrios Christos, A History of the Belief in Christ from the Beginnings of Christianity to Irenaeus, translated by John E. Steely (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1970 1913). The difference between the two authors is almost total, in methodology and in conclusions. For Bousset, the miracle stories are largely due to the creativity of the early communities. 'The faith of the community . . . above all surrounded this picture of Jesus with the nimbus of the miraculous . . . We are still able to see clearly how the earliest tradition of Jesus' life was relatively free from the miraculous' (p. 98, and pp. 99-106). He would only agree with Newman's claim about 'Son of God' to the extent that we have here a separation from the Jewish Dispensation. The formation of the title with the sense in question would be attributed to others however. Those responsible would probably not be even the Palestinian primitive community (p. 94), but its proper setting is the 'Gentile Christian Church' with 'Pauline-Johannine Christology' (p. 97). In the introduction to the 5th edition, R. Bultmann refers to Kyrios Christos - 'Among the works of New Testament scholarship the study of which I used to recommend in my lectures to students as indispensable, above all belonged . . . Kyrios Christos.' (p. 7). See also Stephen Neill, The Interpretation of the New Testament 1861 - 1961, The Firth Lecture, 1962 (London: Oxford University Press, 1964), pp. 163-4.

The Contrast with Apollonius

Examination of the complete context of inquiry enables us to see how Newman's response to the miracles attributed to Apollonius of Tyana is at the same time consistent, yet expresses different conclusions about their historicity. They do not engage the claim to be acts of the God who is at least partially known, and the whole theistic context is rather set aside - to the detriment of the wonders in question. But apart from this issue, Newman believed that these wonders could be excised from the story of Apollonius, without doing irreparable damage to the text as a whole. Newman refers to Apollonius vanishing from the court before delivering his defence, as follows.

> Philostratus supplies us with an ample defence, which he was to have delivered, had he not in the course of the proceedings suddenly vanished from the court, and transported himself to Puteoli . . . This is the only miraculous occurrence which forces itself into the history as a component part of the narrative, the rest being of easy omission without any detriment to its entireness. [Newman adds as a footnote]
>
> > Perhaps his causing of the writing of the indictment to vanish from the paper, when he had been brought before Tigellinus, may be an exception, as being the alleged cause of his acquittal. In general, however, no consequence follows from his marvellous actions: e.g. when imprisoned by Domitianus, in order to show Damis his power, he is described as drawing his leg out of fetters, and then - as putting it back again . . . a great exertion of power with apparently small object. [44]

Unlike this, Newman maintains that the miracles of the Pentateuch, the Gospels and the Acts are of a piece with the entire work, and excisions would spoil the entire composition.

> The miraculous events of the Pentateuch, on the contrary, or of the Gospels and Acts, though of course they may be rejected together with the rest of the narrative, can be rejected in no other way; since they form its substance and groundwork, and, like the figure of Phidias on Minerva's shield, cannot be erased without spoiling the entire composition. [45]

Newman has recognized an essential aspect of any response to the Gospel miracles, namely, that they are not a mere appendix to the text that can be separated off, nor segments to be merely dropped. Nor does it make sense to interpret first the rest of the Gospels and then make a piece-meal response to the miraculous. As we have begun to see in the discussion of Aquinas on the miraculous, miracle is amenable to being approached as a central if not dominant feature of the Gospels.

In responding to this point, it remains to be seen whether we can find another 'holistic' response to miracle that does justice to this apparent centrality if we are not going to account for it on the basis of a uniformly literal historicity.

Newman's extensive article on Apollonius refers to the religio-political context in which the Vita emerged. From the beginning, the setting was one of rivalry to the claims of Christianity, and he describes Philostratus' patroness, Julia Domna, as 'celebrated in the cause of Heathen Philosophy'. Again,

> Though it is not a professed imitation of the Scripture history of Christ, it contains quite enough to show that it was written with a view to rivalling it; and accordingly, in the following age, it was made use of in a direct attack upon Christianity by Hierocles, Praefect of Bythinia.[46]

On two counts, that of rivalry with Christianity, and the historical credentials of Philostratus' alleged sources, recent work by Howard Kee[47] supports this aspect of Newman's observations. They certainly differ from the beliefs of C.P. Eells, in the Preface to his 1923 translation of the text, where he wrote,

> The book itself contains no allusion to Christianity. . . . If any attack on the Church was intended . . . it was too covert to be effective. . . . The internal evidence of the book is even more convincing that it is what it purports to be, a faithful and painstaking compilation from Damis' notes . . . If either Philostratus or Damis consciously exaggerated the miracles . . . they must have been astounded by their own moderation.[48]

By the time we have finished outlining the scope of Newman's admission of the miraculous into theological and historical inquiry, we might conclude that his response to Apollonius' miracles is a case of 'the pot calling the kettle black'. Newman will be seen to believe that many no less amazing wonders come to us on sufficient grounds to be accepted as historical occurrences, so long as the legitimate theistic context of inquiry is maintained and can be invoked. But, outside this context, we find him virtually Humean in his response to miracle reports. The following response to Apollonius' miracles could well serve as a Humean missive against the Pentateuchal wonders, or the wonder of the cathedral door-keeper whose leg regrew.

> To state these pretended prodigies is in most cases a refutation of their claim upon our notice and even those which are not in themselves exceptionable, become so from the circumstances, or manner in which they took place.[49]

Similarly, Woolston had referred to the element of an authoritative context carrying the credibility of otherwise difficult narratives - as for example in his response to the story of the Gadarene demoniacs, of which he said that only the fact that the Evangelists referred to the existence of the gigantic herd of swine made this 'fact' believable.[50] He adds that had the story come down to us attributed to some other figure from the ancient past, it would as likely have been taken by our Divines as a confutation of his claims upon us, rather than supporting them.[51]

But Newman, admitting the possibility of miracles, is not thereby obliged to admit all accounts of wonders into the realm of history. And while the Gadarene swine may present him with some problems for his historical imagination, chiefly because the account is found in Scripture (for which he sets aside a special sense of certainty or trustworthiness) there are a number of areas in which the Apollonius story does not in fact make strong claims to be accepted as anything like accurate historical remembrance.

Chief among these obstacles are the silent century between Apollonius' apparent demise, the formation of the narrative from the 'device' of Damis' notebook, and the religio-political motivations of the author's patroness.

Ad hoc Responses generated by the Context of Inquiry

Though Newman has established what he considers to be the proper context for an inquiry into miracles, he insists that contextual considerations are not sufficient, by themselves, to justify belief in the occurrence of a particular miracle. The context merely enables the specific evidence to be examined impartially.

> We have done no more than recommend to notice the evidence, whatever it may be, which is offered on its behalf. Even, then, could miracles be found with as strong an antecedent case as those of Scripture, still direct testimony must be produced to substantiate their claims on our belief.[52]

But, as we shall see, Scripture itself has an authority that does not merely depend upon the combination of a theistic context with uniformly-good, historical evidence.

Scripture possesses a place in Revealed Religion, and is in a real sense above the vagaries of historical testimonies and the search for a rational context of inquiry. While good evidence may be gleaned for some miracles in some parts of the Scriptures,

in many places, it is the mere fact of being in Scripture at all that is significant for Newman. As a result, particular miracles, such as those in the Pentateuch, whose historical attestations may be thought weak, or irrecoverable, are not to be rejected or redescribed, but to be defended by the fact that they occupy a place in the Sacred Text. Newman is responding here to Hume's (and indirectly, Reimarus') objections to any consideration of these wonders as literal events. He writes,

> From a variety of causes, then, it happens that miracles which produced a rational conviction at the time when they took place, have ever since proved rather an objection to Revelation than an evidence for it, and have depended on the rest for support . . . it is no uncommon practice with those who are ill-affected to the cause of Revealed Religion to dwell upon such miracles as at the present day rather require than contribute evidence, as if they formed a part of the present proof on which it rests its pretensions.53

It seems to me that a point would be reached when an interpreter realized that to persist with this general defence of miracles was not in fact the best way of responding to them in their own setting, and did not do justice to other ways of approaching the miraculous element in the texts. Why should it not turn out to be more fruitful by declining to guarantee historicity in <u>every</u> case? The maintenance of uniform historicity on the basis of a particular notion of Revealed Religion even begins to look like a 'policy decision' not to respond to specific difficulties - difficulties that do not go away even when one has addressed the proponents of the ideas as 'ill-affected to the cause of Revealed Religion'. *

<u>Evidence for the Gospel Miracles</u>

<u>Two Degrees of Evidence</u>

It is in lengthy correspondence about his belief in the later miracles of Church history that the most precise expression of Newman's belief in Biblical miracles is found. Throughout October 1851, Newman and Dr Hinds, the Anglican Bishop of Norwich, wrote to each other on the subject of what Newman believed about Ecclesiastical miracles. Their correspondence was first

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* On adopting new approaches (or retaining old ones in the face of empirical difficulties) in scientific inquiry, see I. Lakatos, 'Falsification and the Methodology of Scientific Research Programmes', in I. Lakatos and A. Musgrave (eds.), <u>Criticism and the Growth of Knowledge: Proceedings of the International Colloquium in the Philosophy of Science, London, 1965</u>, Vol. 4 Cambridge: at the University Press, 1970), pp. 115-6.

published in the Morning Chronicle (Oct. 21, 1851), and conveniently collected, with some unnecessary, partisan, editorial comments in the Rambler (Dec. 1851).

The principal point of disagreement is, once more, the issue of contextual support for miracles, and the level of antecedent probability or expectation that can be brought to bear on particular reports. As we shall see, because of the special place, the almost unquestioned certainty which Newman permitted Biblical miracles to possess, they could then function as part of the non-problematical background against which testimony for later miracles could be evaluated. Some of the quality of the former wonders, almost 'rubbed-off', as it were, onto the later miracles.

Turning to the correspondence, we find that Hinds had not quite appreciated Newman's distinction between credibility of a report that was due to the antecedent conditions of the inquiry, the contextual likelihood, and the credibility that was due to the specific testimony offered. Hence, when Newman referred to miracles of Church history possessing a greater credibility than Scripture miracles, Hinds understood him to mean that miracles of the later ages could be provided with uniformly better, specific evidence than the miracles of Scripture. This, he equated with the promotion of a naive gullibility and credulity. Newman set out the Bishop's charge against him, that he

> . . . maintains that the legendary stories of those puerile miracles, which I believe until now few Protestants thought that the Roman Catholics themselves believed - that these legends have a claim to belief equally with that word of God which relates the miracles of our God as recorded in the Gospel, and that the authority of the one is as the other, the credibility of the one based on a foundation no less sure than the credibility of the other. [54]

At this point, Newman makes his distinction between the credibility due to 'antecedent probability or verisimilitude', and the credibility of a particular claim that is 'furnished with sufficient evidence, provable'. He maintains that the two types of miracles are somewhat on the same level of antecedent likelihood, though distinct in the matter of specific evidence.

> I certainly do think that the ecclesiastical miracles are as credible, in this sense, as the Scripture miracles; nay, more so, because they come after Scripture; and Scripture breaks, (as it were), the ice. The miracles of Scripture begin a new law; they innovate on an established order. There is less to surprise in a second miracle than in a first. [55]

William Ward expanded on this point, when discussing a piece of anti-Newman polemic some forty years after this correspondence. The work was E.A. Abbott's Philomythus, An Antidote Against Credulity (1891). The reissuing of Newman's works on miracles had led to a renewed discussion of his arguments, and Ward's article appeared in the Contemporary Review for July 1891. Ward wrote,

> Newman admitted in great part Hume's contention as to the antecedent improbability of all miracles whatsoever. He saw, however, that once the Scripture miracles are believed - once miracle is admitted at all into the category of established fact - logically the deep incredulity which from Hume's standpoint was not unreasonable, must give way. [56]

Specifically, we find Newman writing,

> Miracles are not only not unlikely, they are positively likely; and for this simple reason, because, for the most part, when God begins, He goes on. We conceive that when He first did a miracle, He began a series; what He commenced, He continued: what has been will be. . . . it is incomparably more difficult to believe that the Divine Being should do one miracle and no more, than that He should do a thousand; that He should do one great miracle only, than that He should do a multitude of less besides. [57]

The Value of being in Scripture

The certainty attaching to the Scriptural miracles played a vital part in Newman's total response to miracle. This certainty disarmed the presumptive force of scepticism and incredulity levelled against any testimony offered to a miracle coming from the later ages of the Church. He suggests that the certainty attaching to the Scripture miracles is virtually sui generis, and this creates a presumption in favour of there being later wonders.

> I do not see how it can be denied that ecclesiastical miracles, as coming after Scripture miracles, have not to bear the brunt of that antecedent improbability which attaches, as Hume objects, to the idea of a violation of nature. Ecclesiastical miracles are probable because Scripture miracles are true. . . . The Scripture miracles are credible, i.e. provable, on a ground peculiar to themselves - on the authority of God's word. [58]

We need to see the specific matters of fact over which Newman and Hinds disagreed. What, in particular did Newman believe that so offended the good Bishop? Hinds [59] cites examples from Newman's 'Lectures on the Present Position of Catholics in England' to which he objects. He objects both to belief in the specific miracles, and to the tendency, that he sees, to damage the miracles of Scripture by associating them with this later, mixed, and partially disreputable collection. Turning to the Lectures themselves, we find the extent of Newman's beliefs.

> And so as regards the miracles of the Catholic church; if, indeed, miracles never can occur, then, indeed, impute the narratives to fraud; but till you prove they are not likely, we shall consider the histories which have come down to us true on the whole, though in particular cases they may be exaggerated or unfounded. Where, indeed, they can certainly be proved to be false, there we shall be bound to do our best to get rid of them; . . . For myself, lest I appear in any way to be shrinking from a determinate judgement on the claims of some of those miracles and relics, . . . I will avow distinctly, that, putting out of the question the hypothesis of unknown laws of nature (that is, of the professed miracle being not miraculous), I think it impossible to withstand the evidence which is brought for the liquefaction of the blood of St. Januarius at Naples, and for the motion of the eyes of the Madonna in the Roman States. . . . I firmly believe that the relics of the saints are doing innumerable miracles and graces daily, and that it needs only for a Catholic to show devotion to any saint in order to receive special benefits from his intercession. I firmly believe that saints in their life-time have before now raised the dead to life, crossed the sea without vessels, multiplied grain and bread, cured incurable diseases, and superseded the operation of the laws of the universe in a multitude of ways.[60] (Italics mine)

Moving on, we see Newman acknowledging the strangeness of any belief in particular miracles, but tracing the reality and legitimacy of the act from the recognition that miracle is itself the central category by which we approach the figure of Jesus at all. Belief in these wonders is, for him, a corollary of belief in the Incarnation, the credibility of which is on its own footings.

> Many men, when they hear an educated man so speak, will at once impute the avowal to insanity, or to an idiosyncrasy, or to imbecility of mind, or to decrepitude of powers, or to fanaticism, or to hypocrisy. They have a right to say so, if they will; and we have a right to ask them why they do not say it of those who bow down before the Mystery of mysteries, the Divine Incarnation. If they do not believe this, they are not yet Protestants; if they do, let them grant that He who has done the greater may do the less.[61]

But as Newman makes clear, the Incarnation and the particular miracles of Jesus do not present themselves to us on the same footing as the later miracles. Though there may well be good historical evidence for the former, their primary claim upon us comes from their place in the Scripture - which, for Newman, is to say that God Himself has spoken.

> The Scripture miracles are credible, i.e., provable, on a ground peculiar to themselves on the authority of God's Word. . . . I think it 'impossible to withstand the evidence which is brought for the liquefaction of the blood of St. Januarius'. Should I thus speak of the resurrection of Lazarus? Should I say, 'I think it impossible to withstand the evidence for his resurrection?' . . . a Catholic would say, 'I believe it with a certainty beyond all other certainty, for God has spoken'. Moreover, I believe with a like certainty every one of the

> Scripture miracles, not only that apostles and prophets 'in their lifetimes have before now raised the dead to life' &c., but that Elias did this, and St. Peter did that, and just as related, and so on through the whole catalogue of their miracles.[62]

Here, Newman sounds the same as Locke in an appeal to the particular value and trustworthiness of the Scriptural miracles as established on the probity of God's word - 'whatever God has said is to be believed absolutely and by all'.[63] This, it seems to me, is Newman's own conclusion about miracles, and indicates that the earlier possibilities of Tract 85 were not in fact developed into a new approach. Newman's belief in the Bible as the Word of God led him to accept the accounts of Noah's Ark in a somewhat historical sense.

> I believe it, though more difficult to the reason, with a firmness quite different from that with which I believe the account of a saint's crossing the sea on his cloak, though less difficult to the reason; for the one comes to me on the Word of God, the other on the word of man.[64]

Inspiration and Miracle

Incarnation, theistic certainties, beliefs about the presence of Christ in the Church, and beliefs about the Scriptures all combine to form and shape the interpretation of miracle stories. Amongst these overlapping factors, being in Scripture is said to be especially significant. It is not a question of historical credentials but of the inspiration of Scripture.

> Were it not that the Evangelists were divinely guided, doubtless we should have in Scripture that confused mass of truth and fiction together, which the Apocryphal Gospels exhibit, . . .
> . . . The Scripture miracles were in themselves what they are to us now, at the very time that the world was associating them with the prodigies of Jewish strollers, heathen magicians and astrologers, and idolatrous rites; they would have been thus associated to this day, had not inspiration interposed . . . And such is the state in which Ecclesiastical miracles actually do come to us, because inspiration was not continued; they are dimly seen in twilight and amid shadows.[65]

Inspiration is not confined to the Gospel miracles but devolves to the texts of the entire Scripture. This has an effect on our response to miracles in the books of Kings and Daniel, for instance, even as we recognize that they are not told to us as parts of a history per se.

> Those of Elisha in particular are related, not as parts of the history, but rather as his 'Acta'; as illustrations indeed of that double portion of power gained for him by Elijah's prayer . . . but still with a profusion and variety very like the luxuriance which offends us in the

> miraculous narratives of ecclesiastical authors. Elisha begins by parting Jordan with Elijah's mantle; then he curses the children and bears destroy forty-two of them; then he supplies the kings of Judah, Israel, and Edom with water in the wilderness . . . then he renders the poisonous pottage harmless by casting meal into it . . . then he makes the iron swim; . . .
> . . . then he dies and is buried, and by accident a corpse is thrown into his grave; and 'when the man was let down, and touched the bones of Elisha, he revived, and stood up on his feet'. (2 Kings xiii.21) Surely it is not too much to say, <u>that after this inspired precedent</u> there is little in ecclesiastical legends of a nature to offend as regards their matter; <u>their</u> credibility turning first on whether they are to be expected at all, and next whether they are avouched on sufficient evidence.[66] (Italics mine)

Clearly then, Newman does not claim that we have the best <u>historical</u> access to Elisha's wonders. He notes the access as to his 'Acta' - but the clear implication is that being in Scripture, we can be certain that Elisha did in fact do these wonders even though we are long past an independent recovery of the first-hand material; - all that we might require of an historical biography. Certainty about Elisha generates a capacity to sift the specific evidence for wonders that are otherwise similar, from different ages, and which yet lack the guarantor of Inspiration and the status of the Sacred Text. He extends the discussion and the inspirational certainty to the miracles in Daniel, where again is presented 'a view of the miraculous . . . very much resembling what we disparage in ecclesiastical legends, or again in the historical portions of the so-called Apocrypha'[67] - save for the intervention of inspiration.

It does not seem to me that one would have to move very far from this appeal to inspiration (this application of it to achieve a certainty about what would otherwise be uncertain), before we were open to the charge of maintaining an ad hoc position not warranted by available evidence, or even amenable to a better kind of response. Here, I find difficulties with the rationale of the appeal to inspiration.

<u>Response to the Gospel Miracles</u>

Nothing, as it were, comes of the earlier, apparently critical questions that he put to the Gospels in the mid-1830s. For instance, in Tract 85, he addressed the following questions to the Gospels, and whereas Strauss went on to form a new approach to miracle, making use of these kinds of observations, it seems that for Newman, they remained inconsistencies that the overall outlook and tradition of interpretation could absorb.

> Considering how great a miracle the raising of Lazarus is in itself and how connected with our Lord's death, how is it that the first three Gospels do not mention it? They speak of the chief priests taking counsel to put him to death, but give no reason; rather they seem to assign other reasons, as the parables he spoke against them (Matt. xxi.45). At length, St. John mentions the miracle and its consequences. Things important then may be true, though particular inspired documents do not mention them. As the raising of Lazarus is true, though not contained at all in the first three Gospels.[68]
>
> (Italics mine)

Again, that Mark and Matthew contain two miraculous feedings raises a number of issues, not least among which is the historically-minded question about what the twelve should have learnt from the first occasion that would have prepared them for the second. Newman confines his comments here to the significance of the second story being in Scripture.

> And in like manner as regards the Gospels, did the account of the feeding of the four thousand with the seven loaves rest on the testimony of Antiquity, most of us would have said 'You see how little you can trust the fathers; it was not 4000 with seven loaves but 5000 with five'.[69]

What could be taken as an opportunity for a critical discussion about the Evangelists' intentions in narrating two incidents, is in fact confined to contrasting the authority of Scripture with other sources. Evangelists' intentions and historicity go hand in hand. Appeal to Scripture also solves the riddle of Malchus' ear - at least, up to a point.

> For instance: St. Peter struck off the ear of Malchus, when our Lord was seized. St. John gives the names; St. Matthew and St. Mark relate the occurrence without the names. This is commonly explained on the ground that St. John is writing later than his brother Evangelists, and when all parties were dead, might give the names without exposing St. Peter to any civil inconveniences. True, this is an explanation so far, but what explains their omitting, and St. John omitting our Lord's miracle in healing the ear, while St. Luke relates it?[70]

As far as I can make out, Newman accepts St. Luke's account, but remains unconcerned by the others' omission, though his comment, 'is it not what would be called unnatural, if it were a question, not of history but of doctrine?' seems to leave the matter somewhat hanging in the air. But apart from the issue of being in Scripture, Newman believes that the Apostles rate as good historical witnesses to miracles.

In assessing testimony, one's estimation of the calibre of the witnesses is important. This is so whether the event in question is a miracle, something strange, or even something

commonplace. Though with a miracle we may look for a more rigorous and exacting scrutiny of the testifiers, Newman rightly concludes, 'But in any case the testimony cannot turn out to be more than that of competent and honest men; and an inquiry must not be prosecuted under the idea of finding something beyond this'.[71] Newman lists a number of qualities by which he rates the Apostles as good witnesses, including their lack of assignable worldly advantage, their actual suffering, lack of party spirit, need of providing an alternative motive for getting up their story, their presumed good moral character, lack of prevarication, exaggeration, and their straightforward attitude to what they tell.[72] These conclusions match his beliefs that independent witnesses lie behind the different Gospels, and that variations are not due to transmission processes, but purely to different original perspectives.

> The Books of the New Testament, containing as they do separate accounts of the same transactions, admit of a minute cross-examination, which terminates so decidedly in favour of their fidelity, as to recommend them highly on the score of honesty, even independently of the known sufferings of the writers.[73] (Italics mine)

Newman's approach to the historicity of the Gospel miracles enabled him to put forward the public nature of the miracles therein as further evidence of their reality. Their 'publicity' is part of their genuine facticity, not part of the genre-features of miracle-stories. All the following features become evidence for the historical reality of the miracles: - the disciples are invited to touch the risen Jesus, they see Jairus' daughter raised - and even a crowd must have witnessed the sun standing still at Joshua's command![74] In all, he can approach the Gospels as giving straightforward testimony of good quality witnesses. As prior prejudices against miracle have been removed, this combination settles the outcome of his interpretative approach to the Gospel miracles.

Newman describes the Apostles in such a way that their observational capacities and innate shrewdness adds to the stature of what they see and report.

> The inhabitants of a maritime and border country, as Galilee was, engaged, moreover in commerce, composed of natives of various countries, and, therefore, from the nature of the case acquainted with more than one language, have necessarily their intellects sharpened and their minds considerably enlarged, and are of men least disposed to acquiesce in marvellous tales. Such a people must have examined before

> they suffered themselves to be excited in the degree which the Evangelists describe.[75]

Again, Newman's claim moves us right up to the point where a shift in the problem-perspective would generate important insights into Mark and its miracles. For, with this claim about the clear-sighted rationality of the Galileans, he prepares the way to describe the effects of the miracles. He speaks of them not causing 'a bare and indolent assent to facts' but 'conversion in principles and of life, and a consequent sacrifice of all that nature holds dear, to which none would submit except after the fullest examination of the authority enjoining it'.[76] But in fact, the miracles in Mark have a curiously limited effect on the twelve. They are as limited in effect on them, as were the miracles on the Exodus Israelites, to whom Newman has referred. The disciples' 'Galilean-maritime astuteness' seems in reality to lead to little at all. They are even incapable of discussing the clearly announced Resurrection with Jesus, and curious enigma reigns from Mk1:1-16:8. Newman's following statement, in hindsight, does not do justice to issues raised by that Evangelist.

> Nor is it necessary, I conceive, to bring evidence for more than a fair proportion of the Miracles; supposing that is, those which remain unproved are shown to be similar to them, and indissolubly connected with the same system. It may even be said, that if the single fact of the Resurrection be established, quite enough will have been proved for believing all the Miracles of Scripture.[77]

A century before, Woolston had written that he would give 'the literal History of Christ's Resurrection, that sandy foundation of the Church, a Review, and so conclude my Discourses on the Miracles of our Saviour'.[78]

We may note, here, that Newman did not limit his claim to 'all the miracles of the Gospels'. But the issues remain for us. In what sense is the Resurrection, as portrayed by the Evangelists, a miracle? What tensions are raised by its relationship with preceding miracles? Granted that miracles can happen, is it conceivable, historically, that the disciples could witness these things and remain unprepared for a Resurrection? - and one announced beforehand at that. These are issues that seem not to have taken hold of Newman at this point, and they remain to be considered, whatever one's wider theology.

Newman remained firm in the belief that the Gospels provided good-quality historical evidence for the belief that Jesus

did the miracles attributed to him, and that these miracles preceded his rising from the dead. As we have said though, they are primarily responded to as a part of Scripture, and it is this response that carries the determinative weight or value. Scripture vindicates its weakest members.

> Hence the Scripture accounts of Eve's temptation by the serpent; of the speaking of Balaam's ass; of Jonah and the whale; and of the devils sent into the herd of swine, are by themselves more or less improbable, being unequal in dignity to the rest. They are then supported by the system in which they are found.[79]

There is always a cumulative, mutually reinforcing response to the miracles of Scripture.

> The truth of the Mosaic narrative is proved from the genuineness of the Pentateuch, as written to contemporaries and eye-witnesses of the miracles; from the traditions contained in the Pentateuch; from the very existence of the Jewish system . . . and from the declarations of the New Testament writers. The miracles of Elijah and Elisha are proved to us by the authority of the books in which they are related, and by means of the New Testament.[80]

Continuing our account of Newman's particular responses to Gospel miracle stories, we find some brief remarks about the limited evidential value of exorcisms, while he does maintain belief in the literal reality of demons and unclean spirits.[81] There is a brief reference to the fact that Jesus was not unique in using 'clay' in healings, since external means were used by the heathens in their pretended cures. And he notes that walking on the water will be a greater miracle where fables of power or magic are ruled out as possible explanations.[82] Similarly, the presence of eye-witnesses removes the possibility of appealing to coincidence in the calming of the storm and in other miracles: - raising the dead and giving sight to the blind are beyond 'the conceivable effects of artifice and accident', especially when met with in the one story.[83]

Though we find little sense of any <u>one</u> Gospel raising issues for the understanding of miracles, or indeed, of miracles having significantly differing emphases from Gospel to Gospel, Newman does focus on one, basic and central issue for any response to miracle in the Gospels. We are still left with the task of accounting for what we may call the 'miraculization' of Jesus: - that across the four Gospels, Jesus' life begins and ends in the miraculous, and his work displays miraculous power throughout. In accounting for this phenomenon,

> It becomes, then, a balance of opposite probabilities, whether gratuitously to suppose a multitude of perfectly

> unknown causes, and these, moreover, meeting in one and the same history, or to have recourse to one, and that a known power, then miraculously exerted for an extraordinary and worthy object. [84]

We can recover more of what Newman did with the miracles from his regular preaching. (From 1850 to 1880, it seems that as a matter of course, except for some special occasion, he did not use written-out sermons, as had been his custom as an Anglican; nor did he preach from notes. The sermon notes that we possess were written down after he had preached, to provide a reminder of what he had said.) [85]

In both 1856 and 1864, Newman preached on the healing of the deaf and dumb man (Mk.7:32). In both cases, the reality of the miracle is presumed as a kind of back-drop, while other, more immediate issues are emphasized. On the former occasion, while mentioning the touch and the command, it is more important for the sermon that the man is said to be brought by others. This kind of co-operation for good, in bringing people to Christ, is what will build up the Church. On the latter occasion, the miracle is expounded typically, and the maladies of the healed exhibit the state of man in sin. The blind are those who do not understand doctrine or who have no faith, the deaf are those without devotion etc. [86]

In the earlier Anglican sermon, 'Christ, the Son of God made Man', he referred to the use Jesus made of spittle in healing.

> When He spat on the ground, and made clay of the spittle, and He anointed the eyes of the blind man with the clay (John ix.6.), He exerted the virtue of His Divine Essence through the properties and circumstances of the flesh. [87]

In just the same way, though to a different end, the breath from Jesus' mouth is the means by which the Holy Spirit is passed to the disciples,

> When He breathed on His disciples and said "Receive ye the Holy Ghost (John xx.22)", He vouchsafed to give His Holy Spirit <u>through the breath of His human nature</u>.[88] (Italics mine)

Newman acknowledges that there is an outward similarity between Jesus' healings that employ these outward means, and those of other miracle workers. And he does not doubt that the accounts refer to events or practices not confined to Jesus alone. But resort to the Incarnation gives Jesus' miracles a greater claim upon our attention, and the certainty that they are genuine miracles of God forming part of the complete revelation worked in His Son. The unifying principle of Incarnation even enables the '<u>saliva</u> principle' to be extended to the <u>blood</u> shed at the cross.

> When He poured out His precious blood upon the Cross, it was not a man's blood, though it belonged to His manhood, but blood full of power and virtue, instinct with life and grace, as issuing most mysteriously from Him who was the Creator of the world.[89]

References in the miracle stories to demons or unclean spirits are understood as references to literally existing beings. Thus,

> We find in the Gospels the devil speaking with the voice of his victim, so that the tormentor and the tormented could not be distinguished from each other. They seemed to be one and the same, though they were not, as appeared when Christ and His Apostles cast the devil out.[90]

In an even more elaborate way, four sermons are devoted to the Holy Angels, what they are in Nature and in Grace, with information about their ranks and orders and reality.[91] In preaching on the raising of the son of the widow of Nain, Newman began by referring to the miracle, but rapidly moved on to interpret the whole typically. *

> It was a miracle exercised on one, but it was a sort of specimen of what takes place by God's love so often. It was done once, but it images what occurs continually.[92]

Thus, the mother becomes the Church; the son, the apostate or backslider dead in his sins and being carried away to be buried in Hell; and the four bearers are pride, sensuality, unbelief and ignorance. It seems then that the miracle itself retains only a minor place in the end product, but unlike modern interpretations that totally collapse any sense of historical intention into something else - say, some reality accessible to us in the present - Newman retains the miracle at an historical core.

Newman is also concerned with the possibility of miracles occurring in the believer's present - with whether miracles happen to-day. On the 11th and 12th Sundays after Pentecost 1872, two sermons were devoted to this issue. While he gives a more prominent place to other realities of grace, he leaves ample room for saints, or holy people, to work miracles to-day. But, 'Saints are scarce. We cannot conceive common men doing miracles'.[93]

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* Woolston provides my two favourite examples of typical interpretation of detail in miracle stories, from the account of the paralytic lowered through the roof to Jesus. He notes how the house-top has been taken as 'the intellectual edifice of the world', and the tiles of the house as the 'letter' of the Scriptures - indicating the kind of exegetical work needed to be done to reach Jesus in his real significance. Discourse 4 pp. 66-7.

The Resurrection and Ascension

Resurrection and Incarnation

While it is the man, Christ, who is raised 'in all His glorious attributes'[94] it is the Divine Son who is the motive source and ground of the Resurrection. But in this, there is nothing different than an application of the condition first a reality at the very beginning of the Incarnation, from the moment when the conception took place.

> . . . Christ's resurrection harmonizes with the history of His birth. . . . 'That Holy Thing' which was born of Mary, was 'the Son', not of man, but 'of God'. . . . the Holy Ghost displayed that creative hand, by which, in the beginning, Eve was formed; and the Holy Child, thus conceived by the Power of the Highest, was (as the history shows,) immortal even in His mortal nature . . . Therefore, though He was liable to death, 'it was impossible He should be holden' of it. . . . And hence His rising from the dead may be said to have evinced His divine original. He was 'declared to be the Son of God with power, according to the Spirit of Holiness', that is, His essential Godhead, 'by the resurrection of the dead (Rom. i.4)' [95]

Newman's understanding of Resurrection has many features in common with Aquinas'. Where the latter spoke of Jesus' glory, a reality from the conception onwards, having to be restrained until the death was achieved, Newman has a reference to the glorifying effect of the Deity not taking over until the same moment. Even so, it is a partial reality beforehand, as where it is responsible for the soldiers' falling back when they come to arrest him. But a kind of quantum leap in the manifestation of this reality takes place when the Resurrection occurs.

> Then the Divine Essence streamed forth (so to say) on every side, and environed His Manhood, as in a cloud of glory. So transfigured was His Sacred Body, that He who had deigned to be born of a woman, and to hang upon the cross, had subtle virtue in Him, like a spirit, to pass through the closed doors to His assembled followers; while, by condescending to the trial of their senses, He showed that it was no mere spirit.[96]

The reality of Resurrection generates a capacity and a need to accept as possible, accounts of events that might otherwise be dismissed out of hand. Strauss, Newman's contemporary, responds to these displays of 'subtle virtue' as to manifest contradictions and absurdities, if they are insisted upon as taking place in primary history.

Resurrection and Mystery

But re-interpreters of the miraculous like Strauss and Feuerbach were not the only ones to realize that something strange,

if not otherwise impossible was going on here. Newman speaks of the mode of knowledge or knowing that is engaged by these Resurrection narratives and in our attempts to respond to what it is they are said to encounter.

> He manifested Himself to them, in this His exalted state, that they might be His witnesses to the people; witnesses of those separate truths which man's reason cannot combine, that He had a real human body, that it was partaker in the properties of His soul, and that it was inhabited by the Eternal Word.[97] (Italics mine)

While our minds may be able to comprehend partial aspects of Jesus in His Resurrection, the one, unitary event evades our grasp, though we can safely believe in its reality, and form a partial and sufficient notion of what it was. Where reason and the realm of natural possibilities sets limits, we may indeed have recourse to our imagination to picture something of what we consider it to have been in reality; but, contra Feuerbach, that is not to say that we are dealing with what belongs primarily and solely to the imagination.

We have already seen that Aquinas responded to miracles as to events for which the human reason could not provide explanations in terms of intervening, intermediary states. Also, we began to touch on the extent to which the Resurrection could be approached as something like the permanent 'miraculization' of Jesus - the entering of His complete being into a state miraculous with respect to its condition before the event. In this regard, Newman's response to Resurrection as to a unitary reality that evades the capacity of our reason save when it is broken into partial aspects, is a similar recognition that here the same mystery of miracle applies. Just as we cannot fathom the manner and the means by which water becomes wine, so we cannot fathom, not only the moment of change into the risen condition, but the enduring reality itself.

We also find that there is a reference to this capacity of the human reason to understand partial and hence artificial statements about the Trinity, but of it being confounded when separate statements about Father, Son and Holy Spirit are referred to the One Triune God.[98] Returning to Resurrection, we would be mistaken to think that the use of the one term 'Resurrection' implied that it denoted a single, simple reality that was completely accessible even to the intellects of the first witnesses, let alone us who try to imagine what they saw and touched, spoke and ate with.

But Newman, unlike Strauss, never understood these aspects of the Resurrection reality to be contradictory or impossible.

It is in this context that Newman sets out his beliefs about the Ascension of Jesus. His beliefs follow from the realities of the tomb being emptied, of there being appearances of the risen Christ, of these being of limited overall duration, and from the account(s) of his final appearance at which he went up from their sight. Again, the Ascension is not simply an event that displays its manifest impossibility and self-contradiction. It is not a case of a natural body levitating against the laws of nature, but of a specific act of the particular bodily-state of the risen Christ. If that risen body possesses distinctive qualities appropriate to its new state, then an Ascension as indicated seems to become a possibility - but that is not to say we know much of what is involved. Newman, however, insists that the Ascension is an event that happened to the particular Jesus in his risen state, which indicates that his particular body 'went somewhere'.

> First, Christ's Ascension to the right hand of God is marvellous, because it is a sure token that heaven is a certain fixed place, and not a mere state. That bodily presence of the Savior which the Apostles handled, is not here, it is elsewhere, it is in heaven. This contradicts the notions of cultivated and speculative minds, and humbles the reason. Philosophy . . . would teach if it dare, that heaven is a mere state of blessedness; but, to be consistent, it ought to go on to deny . . . that 'Jesus Christ is come in the flesh' . . . for, certain it is, He who appeared on earth went up from the earth, and a cloud received him out of His Apostles' sight.[99]

This belief is but consistent with granting any corporeal dimension, however much transfigured, to the resurrected Jesus.

In this sermon, Newman does not further resolve the seeming difficulties connected with a 'spatial' goal for this Ascension. Where Aquinas readily translated 'right hand' of God into other non-spatial images, Newman maintains that we are stuck with our images, and cannot ultimately reduce them to nothing but images, nor dispense with them, nor penetrate beyond their use.[100]

Accommodation and Rejection of Miracle

Rational belief?

As we have seen, Newman developed a response to miracle that accommodated its different manifestations in the Old Testament, New Testament, in Church history and in wider sources yet. We have also seen that while he responded to some of the different features

pertaining to each locus, his response exhibited an overall rationale of contextual support and interaction. In this sense, we can say that he responded systematically to the phenomenon of miracle wherever it occurred, from the standing still of the sun for Joshua to the liquefaction of Januarius' blood, with many others besides.

We might want to ask if Newman has entered into an 'anything goes' situation. Has the world become a merely bizarre place, and has his imagination opened a veritable Pandora's Box of possibilities out of which anything might fly, - as in Goya's disturbing picture 'The Sleep of Reason'?

At times, it seems as if Newman is going to be quite modest in his claims. Of the wonders of Gregory Thaumaturgus, he writes,

> . . . on the other hand, when we read of stones changing their places, rivers restrained, and lakes dried up, and, at the same time of buildings remaining in spite of earthquakes, we are reminded, as in the case of Scripture miracles upon the cities of the plain, that a volcanic country is in question, in which such phenomena are to a great extent coincident with the course of nature. It may be added, that the biographer not only is frequent in the phrase 'it is said', 'it is still reported' but he assigns as a reason for not relating more of St Gregory's miracles, that he may be taxing the belief of his readers more than is fitting, and throughout writes in a tone of apology as well as of panegyric.[101]

But in fact, as we have already noted, Newman works outwards from the presumption of certainty granted to the Scriptural miracles and from the certainties of the initial theistic context. So, later, we find a succinct account of his response to Gregory's miracles,

> so does the doctrine of a Divine Presence in the Church supply what is ambiguous in the miracles of Gregory Thaumaturgus or St Martin.[102]

There are, then, a number of interconnected factors at work in any response to miracle reports, and within the outlook that admits their possibility, there are a number of points from which that capacity to accept them emerges. We have touched on Scripture as Inspired, on the context of theistic certainties, and now have referred to a doctrine of Divine Presence in the Church. Let us see how this understanding of Divine Presence in the Church contributes to the rationale of Newman's thinking on miracles. Newman is quite happy with the idea of admitting miracles into the history of the Church. While the Church endures, Christ remains in authority, and is styled its Head or Monarch. Miracles are the 'personal character and professed principles' of Christ the Monarch.[103]

Again, he believes that there

> . . . is One who hath both power over His own work, and who before now has not been unwilling to exercise it. In this point of view then, Ecclesiastical miracles are more advantageously circumstanced than those of Scripture.[104]

We have referred to the centrality of Incarnation for understanding the identity of Jesus in the full extent of His existence from Conception to Ascension. The reality of that presence of God is not simply withdrawn from God's people at Ascension, and hence there remains the possibility that what was present in a miraculous mode and worked many miracles, will still be present and work appropriate miracles. Of the continuing presence of Jesus in the Church, he writes,

> we must not assume that in leaving us, He closed the gracious economy of His Incarnation, and withdrew the gracious ministration of His incorruptible Manhood. . . we receive (we know not how) the virtue of the Heavenly Body. [105]

And he specifically understands this notion of the presence of Christ in the Church as the grounds for expecting miracles from time to time;

> We have been accustomed to believe that Christianity is little more than a creed or doctrine, introduced into the world once for all, and then left to itself, after the manner of human institutions, and under the same ordinary governance with them . . . unattended by any special Divine Presence or any immediately supernatural gift. To minds habituated to such a view of Revealed Religion, the miracles of ecclesiastical history must needs be a shock, and almost an outrage, disturbing their feelings and unsettling their most elementary notions and thoroughly received opinions. They are eager to find defects in the evidence, or appearance of fraud in the witnesses, as a relief to their perplexity, and as an excuse for rejecting, as if on the score of reason, what their heart and imagination have rejected already. Or they are too firmly persuaded of the absurdity . . . to be moved by them at all. [106]

So then miracles, even of the most amazing kind, are to be given an impartial hearing, and even the lack of specific evidence to form a sound belief on historical criteria does not amount to a disproof of the miracle. Here, contextual certainties and presumptions permit a reverent suspension of judgement, or perhaps a pious private opinion. But at the centre lies the Incarnation, and from its reality, all else seems to flow.

> . . . if we believe that Christians are under an extraordinary Dispensation, such as Judaism was, and that the Church is a supernatural ordinance, we shall in mere consistency be disposed to treat even the report of a miraculous occurrence with seriousness, from our faith in a Present Power adequate to their production . . . if we only go so far as to realize

> what Christianity is, when considered merely as a creed, and what stupendous overpowering facts are involved in the doctrine of a Divine Incarnation, we shall feel that no miracle can be great after it, nothing strange or marvellous, nothing beyond expectation. [107] (Italics mine)

So then, are Newman's beliefs rational, or has he merely followed an illogical belief about miracles to its logical conclusions? It is certain that his grasp of miracle as a widespread phenomenon has its centre in the principal reality of Incarnation, which, as we have seen, is miraculous at its core and in its operational scope in Jesus' life. Newman's rationale for miracle really emerges from his capacity to include the reality of the miraculous at this central point. Building miracle into the possibility of things at this point, it merely blossoms with the edifice that is established upon it.

His belief in miracle is certainly rational in the sense that he consistently and rigorously forms his beliefs in accord with a thoroughgoing awareness of the implications of accepting the reality of this one miracle. His is a consistent exposition of belief, in accordance with a first principle that has miracle built into it. By this principle, he acknowledges the limits of the reason in matters pertaining to God, and by accepting the miraculous, accepts things that exceed the powers not only of his mind, but of all created things.

Different Responses to Miracle

Having re-capitulated the scope of Newman's beliefs about miracles, we can refer briefly to some of those positions that he was in disagreement with. The title of Conyers Middleton's work in the middle of the previous century aptly (and extensively) indicates the nature of one form of opposition to Newman's conclusions. We find 'An Introductory Discourse To a Larger Work, Designed hereafter to be Published, concerning the Miraculous Powers Which are supposed to have subsisted in the Christian Church, from the earliest Ages, through several successive Centuries; Tending to shew, That we have no sufficient Reason to believe, upon the Authority of the Primitive Fathers, That any such Powers were continued to the Church, after the days of the Apostles etc.'[108] From him comes the reference to 'the hidden springs and machinery of those lying wonders'.[109] As we have noticed, Newman was not

concerned to deny that there had been numerous fraudulent and mistaken beliefs about miracles. (E. A. Abbott's criticisms of Newman's beliefs on this matter, made at the end of the nineteenth century, at times seems to amount to little more than an intense dislike of Newman and his beliefs.)[110] And we have already touched on Woolston's re-description of the Gospel miracles.

In the chapter on Hume's response to miracles, we shall examine his response, and its differences from Newman's, in full. For now, we can simply note that while Newman adopted a seemingly Humean response to some miracles, agreeing with his conclusions about the miracles of the Abbé de Paris and no doubt, Apollonius, he reaches these conclusions from quite a different perspective. Hume's somewhat statistical elimination of the miracles is countered,[111] from the interlocking contexts that we have referred to.

Scattered throughout Newman's first essay, we find eleven references to miracles that in fact fail to carry conviction of their actuality - that cannot properly be said to have been miracles after all. The references are to the same group of miracles to which Hume referred, the miracles of the Abbé de Paris, and which he held up to ridicule, but not because of the calibre of the testimony, which he thought was as good as any. Newman could even be said to be harder on these miracles than Hume. Perhaps the wider perspective of Kreiser's recent work is needed to re-appraise them. See Robert B. Kreiser, Miracles, Convulsions and Ecclesiastical Politics in early eighteenth century Paris (Princeton, N. J. Princeton University Press), 1978.
Newman's objections to them, severe as they are, can be compressed to the following. They are left to tell their own story (p. 33) and have a political or party object (p. 38) connected with a sect and not with wider mankind. The Jansenist cause with which they were connected, lost ground and was ruined (p. 44) and the effect of the miracles ceased when civil authorities merely bricked-up the gate of the cemetery where the wonders had occurred - which would not have happened if they were genuinely acts of a Divine Agent (pp. 44-5). They were confined to one kind of outcome-healing (p. 59) and some of them were but partial or gradual, 'there being but eight or nine well-authenticated cures out of the multitude of trials'. (p. 59) The miracles were confined to the one spot (p. 61). They could as easily have been the result of excited imaginations capable of affecting specific ailments (p. 64). The recipients were taking other treatment as well (p. 66) and the witnesses were enthusiastic, habitually credulous and ignorant (p. 81). Finally, the Abbé had gained a reputation for eccentricity already (p. 90).

The Significance of Newman's beliefs

Newman's approach to miracles has a number of implications for inquiry into Jesus and his activity. The issues are wider than any attempt to return to the view that the four Gospels are independent creations of four different eye-witnesses, thereby exhibiting remarkable concurrencies and consistencies. I am thinking of the effect that his capacity to have others in Church history working comparable miracles would have on the perceived connection between Jesus in His miracles and in His Resurrection. And again, how the reality of these miracles would ameliorate the tendency to remove large tracts of the Gospel narratives from the realm of the historical, simply because they contained great wonders. To the extent that we acquired knowledge of these other miracle working figures, and judged that their miracles were genuine, we would be acquiring a somewhat familial knowledge of Jesus as a miracle worker, minus, of course the end event of His life.

My point is, that this raises the question of the nature of the tension that one may otherwise be inclined to see between Jesus in His great miracles, and Jesus as the one going to be raised, and it questions the judgement made quite readily that some of Jesus' miracles are misplaced Resurrection stories. On Newman's position, they need be no more than examples of what God has empowered others to do at different times and places. While Newman began with the Inspired record and worked outwards to judgements about later miracles, these later miracles of the saints, diverse in quality and credibility as they are, might be said to return the compliment, and challenge the exegete to consider the implications of Jesus' miracles not in fact being unique, apart from the Resurrection. Newman certainly believed that it was important to respond to Jesus' miracles in this extended conception of the place of the miraculous. Without their full, historical scope, he recognized that even the belief in Jesus' miracles would eventually fail - or be drastically modified. Ward wrote,

> He contrasts the two views of Christianity which were current at the time he wrote - the one allowing the Scripture miracles, allowing that a mass of supernatural interferences had set the Christian scheme afloat, and maintaining that the Creator had then, so to say, retired from His creation; the other, viewing the great outline of Church history as providential . . . and contemplating alleged miracles throughout the history of Christendom as possible instances, prima facie, of His active Providence. The former view he held to be illogical. Denying so much, it should deny more. Or, admitting so much, it should admit more.[112] (Italics mine)

The alternative to this admission or denial is to form a third choice that attempts to retain the significance of miracle, while re-valuing the issue of historicity. While D.F. Strauss also warrants a chapter of his own, I want to end this excursus with some initial observations on their relationship.

Newman and Strauss

While it might be true that Newman never adopted a 'literalist or fundamentalist' approach to Scripture,[113] we have seen just how conservative his particular conclusions could be. This is so even where he broached issues that were seen to have great potential for new departures in the interpretation of miracles. We can see some clear examples of his conclusions about the Gospels in his 1866 review of Seeley's Ecce Homo. Newman wrote,

> . . . Protestants, appeal to Scripture . . . but who is to decide for them the previous question, that Scripture is really such an authority? . . . Doubting about the authority of Scripture, they doubt about its substantial truth; doubting about its truth, they have doubts concerning the Object which it sets before their faith, about the historical accuracy and objective reality of the picture which it presents us of Our Lord.[114]

In another place in this same Review, Newman expresses that largely mimetic view of the Evangelists' task and purpose which we have already encountered -

> Now, what Catholics, what Church Doctors, as well as Apostles, have ever lived on, is not any number of theological canons or decrees, but, we repeat, the Christ Himself, as He is represented in concrete existence in the Gospels.[115] (Italics mine)

Strauss stands diametrically opposed to this interpretation of Jesus amidst His miracles. Concrete existence is not granted to Jesus in His miracles. But both Newman and Strauss insist on paying due attention to the miraculous dimension in any response to the Gospel texts, and not attempting to substitute another less miraculous figure for this Jesus, as being 'what the texts are really saying to us'. Both maintain the importance of miracle for interpretation, but they differ on historicity and its contextual pre-requisites.

I do not believe that Newman read Strauss' Life of Jesus. M.A. Crowther provides a valuable paragraph on the translation of Strauss' work into English. She writes,

> Strauss' Leben Jesu first appeared in English in 1842, seven years after its first publication, and, as its anonymous translator stated, this gap was because English publishers feared to contravene the blasphemy laws by

taking it up. This first translation, in four cheap and shoddy volumes, was published in Birmingham* between 1842 and 1845, and its preface proclaimed the freethinking beliefs and intentions of its translator. Strauss was also available to the working classes at the same time, when Henry Hetherington, the Chartist and publisher of cheap illegal papers for the poor, published it in penny numbers. . . . George Eliot . . . translated the Leben Jesu in 1846, and followed it eight years later with a translation of Feuerbach's Wesen des Christenthums.[116]

And later, Crowther cites Mark Pattison's Memoirs (1885, p. 210) in the context of Newman's ignorance of Strauss' work.

Newman, one of the greatest men in the English Church, knew nothing of German, and Mark Pattison, his former disciple, recalled:

'A.P. Stanley once said to me, "How different the fortunes of the Church of England might have been if Newman had been able to read German". That puts the matter in a nutshell; Newman assumed and adored the narrow basis on which Laud had stood 200 years before. All the grand developments of human reason, from Aristotle down to Hegel, was a sealed book to him.'[117]

We need not agree with the predilection for Hegelian reasonings to accept the judgement about what Newman had or had not read.

But had Newman read Life of Jesus, I believe that references to it would have been much more widespread in his own works. J.D. Holmes believes that Newman never read Strauss.

Although Newman once referred to 'the open infidelity of Strauss' and to the fact that he rejected the gospels as historical documents, there is no real evidence that Newman had ever read the Life of Jesus. Nevertheless, Newman was aware of contemporary opinions and in 1843 he wrote that the gospel narratives had recently 'been viewed as mythical representations from their very perfection; as if a Divine work could not be most beautiful on the one hand and most expedient on the other'.[118]

Newman himself wrote to Pusey in 1858, and said then, that

The two works I had wished to undertake . . . were an argument for Theism, and a review of the mythical theory of the Gospel History - but alas, I shall have time for nothing.[119]

And he seemed not to take up this task in the remaining thirty-two years of his life. A.J. Boekraad, however, warns against presuming that Newman never read Strauss, though he notes that Newman's English translation 'still had the pages uncut'![120] Had he read it, I can imagine him having begun to review it, so much more substantial is it than Seeley's work with its simplistic

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* Birmingham, where Newman, later, was to establish the Oratory!

naturalisms:[121] - an outlook to which Strauss, too, was equally opposed. Newman and Strauss, even before Wrede, could all complain about the 'psychological suppositionitis'[122] that beset life-of-Jesus research.

In conclusion, I believe that, for today, Newman's certainties about the Biblical miracles in their entirety, are of limited value, while his observations about the hiddenness of the Deity in Jesus, and the mystery of non-response to Exodus miracles contain much that still commends itself. In one sense, he forces a uniform conclusion on the issue of historicity by applying an effectively non-revisable belief about the status of Scripture as God's Word. His awareness of intra and inter-Gospel issues (pp. 90-1) never leads to a re-appraisal of the miracles' occurrence. In effect, he refuses to allow insights into the diffuse traditions of ecclesiastical miracles to inform his response to miracles in Scripture, but always works outwards from prior certainties about Biblical miracles. In particular, I believe that my observations on Xavier's miracles (pp. 219-21) provide a definitive example of the weakness in this approach, and contain implications for a more cautious conclusion on the extent of Jesus' miraculous activity. Even somewhat apart from the issue of a coherent world-view that accommodates miracles, I believe that Newman's 'certainties' (pp. 88-9) do not in fact meet the cogent objections raised by Strauss - and this refers especially to the great miracle unique to John, - the raising of Lazarus (see p. 181). In the light of my further inquiry, I would add that Newman's response to the miracles of healing attributed to the Abbé de Paris (p. 103) can be seen as inadequate (see pp. 133-4). Perhaps of principal importance is his belief that the Resurrection stood in a non-problematical relationship with other Biblical miracles, as historical events on a uniformly accessible continuum; and that establishing the Resurrection even makes all other Scriptural miracles believable (p. 93). My considerations in chapter VIII make this last claim unlikely. It is of significance that much modern, Catholic, Gospel exegesis does not in fact follow Newman in his attempt to vindicate belief in all the miracles of Scripture, and to the extent that he identified the Jesus of the Gospel miracles with the Jesus of history.

CHAPTER IV

C. S. LEWIS: A PRELIMINARY TO HISTORICAL INQUIRY?

Conception and Incarnation

Lewis responds to the Infancy Narratives as if they give us information about the historical Joseph, Mary, and the miraculously conceived child.

> When St Joseph discovered that his fiancée was going to have a baby, he not unnaturally decided to repudiate her. Why? Because he knew just as well as any modern gynaecologist that in the ordinary course of nature women do not have babies unless they have lain with men. No doubt the modern gynaecologist knows several things about birth and begetting which St Joseph did not know. But these things do not concern the main point - that a virgin birth is contrary to the course of nature. And St Joseph obviously knew that. . . . When St Joseph finally accepted the view that his fiancée's pregnancy was not due to unchastity but to a miracle, he accepted the miracle as something contrary to the known order of nature. [1]

The same presumption is found in the following;

> If St Joseph had lacked faith to trust God or humility to perceive the holiness of his spouse, he could have disbelieved in the miraculous origin of her Son as easily as any modern man; and any modern man who believes in God can accept the miracle as easily as St Joseph did. [2]

Lewis refers to Mary under the principle of the selective and undemocratic process that God has employed in the past to achieve His ends - 'selective and undemocratic to the highest degree'. Abraham's selection is the founding example of what is repeated in new ways until

> The process gets narrower and narrower, sharpens at last into one small bright point like the head of a spear. It is a Jewish girl at her prayers. All humanity (so far as concerns its redemption) has narrowed to that.[3]

As with Aquinas and Newman, this redemption is brought about by the Incarnation, from the moment of conception, of God the Son.

> On the finally selected Woman falls the utmost depth of maternal anguish. Her Son, the Incarnate God, is a 'man of sorrows'.[4]

and again,

> The central miracle asserted by Christians is the Incarnation. They say God became Man. Every other miracle prepares for this, or exhibits this, or results from this. . . . every particular Christian miracle manifests at a particular place and moment the character and significance of the Incarnation.[5]

Just as Aquinas discussed the biological miracle of the conception in the context of the 'additional' miracle of God the Son becoming Incarnate, we find Lewis (on a smaller scale), referring to the same context in his references to the miracle that are concerned with the aspect of human reproduction.

> But it would be out of place here to explore the religious significance of the miracle. We are here concerned with it simply as Miracle - that and nothing more. As far as concerns the creation of Christ's human nature (the Grand Miracle whereby His divine begotten nature enters into it is another matter) the miraculous is one more witness that here is Nature's Lord.[6]

As we saw (S. C. G., III. I. LXVII, p. 161), Aquinas could also consider the acts of a thing, say, the acts of a man and woman in their reproductive capacity, as the act of God. As principal agent, He causes the active forces or potential of all things, and 'every operation of a thing is reducible to Him as a cause'. Lewis, also, attributes this miraculous conception to the same God who is in this sense, responsible for every human conception. In part, he wants to recover the sense of God as the God of fertility, as well as of the rest of creation. He respects the pagan reference to Genius, - the ancients'

> god of animal and human fertility, the patron of gynaecology, embryology, and the marriage bed - the 'genial' bed as they called it after its god.[7]

He sees Genius as a mask for the God of Israel, who, at the beginning, commanded and made the species to be fruitful and multiply. This act of God remains the paradigm of creativity, and accounts for his otherwise strange use of 'creative' in the following.

> In a normal act of generation the father has no creative function. A microscopic particle of matter from his body, and a microscopic particle from the woman's body meet. And with that there passes the colour of his hair and the hanging lower lip of her grandfather . . . Behind every spermatazoon lies the whole history of the universe: locked within it lies no inconsiderable part of the world's future. The weight or drive behind it is the momentum of the whole interlocked event which we call Nature up-to-date. And we know that the 'laws of Nature' cannot supply that momentum. If we believe that God created Nature that momentum comes from Him. The human father is merely an

> instrument, a carrier . . . simply the last in a long line of carriers - a line that stretches far beyond his ancestors into pre-human and pre-organic deserts of time, back to the creation of matter itself. That line is in God's hand. It is the instrument by which He normally creates a man. For He is the reality behind both Genius and Venus; [8] (Italics mine)

At the most, man possesses an instrumental creativity in the process of forming children. But whether that is best indicated by saying that he has no creative function is another matter.

Another distinctive feature of Lewis' beliefs about ordinary conception is indicated in the above passage. It concerns his reference to Nature, and the extent to which a person is part of it. It is significant that he refers to sperm and ova as particles of matter, and elsewhere, to the impossibility of deriving man's rational spirit or reason from something in the causally interlocking, material realm of Nature. Man's mind must come from what is itself already mind, and he seems to deny the possibility that a man and woman form even incipient mind in conception. He does not allow that the genetic reality brought to and formed in conception, itself accounts for incipient or nascent rationality in what is conceived. This gives a very definite sense to his claim that men and women have no really creative function in human reproduction. He limits what they are responsible for in the child that otherwise results from their union.

It is in this context that he refers to 'spirit'. Man possesses something that does not come to him from the vast, causally interlocking realm of material Nature. Conception, understood as the combination of complex, living matter, does not form nascent rational spirit. A creative act must accompany it, and that comes directly from God. Hence,

> Some people use 'spirit' to mean that relatively supernatural element which is given to every man at his creation - the rational element. [9] (Italics mine)

And again,

> Human minds, then, are not the only supernatural entities that exist. They do not come from nowhere. Each has come into Nature from Supernature: each has its taproot in an eternal, self-existent, rational Being, whom we call God. Each is an offshoot, or spearhead, or incursion of that Supernatural reality into Nature. [10]

There is then a special sense in which it is said that God creates every person. He acts to form the complete human being, over and above what He achieves by delegation, as it were, to the reproductive capacities of men and women. As, then, there is said

to be a special act of God to form man with his rational spirit, it seems that man himself has been described in a similar way to some of the entities encountered in Aquinas' survey of the miracles in the Gospels. For Lewis, a person is not accounted for in terms of the powers and properties of things that already exist. Incipient rationality is not formed simply by the combination of what derives from mother and father. An appeal to a special act of God is made. That a person exists as a rational being is thus somewhat miraculous, and is in this respect on a par with the birth star, and the dove at the descent of the Spirit - both of which also required special, creative acts of God to account for their existence.

> The presence of human rationality in the world is therefore a Miracle by the definition given in Chapter II. . . . Human Reason and Morality have been mentioned not as instances of Miracle . . . but as proofs of the Supernatural: not in order to show that Nature ever is invaded but that there is a possible invader. Whether you choose to call the regular and familiar invasion by human Reason a Miracle or not is largely a matter of words. Its regularity - the fact that it regularly enters by the same door, human sexual intercourse - may incline you not to do so. It looks as if it were (so to speak) the very nature of Nature to suffer Miracles in general.[11] (Italics mine)

As we saw in the discussion of Aquinas on miracle, it is indeed part of the apology generated by the admission of miracle that Nature becomes defined or conceptualized as fundamentally open to miracle. That is, however, not the same as defining particular, putative parts of Nature (human minds) as due to something like a standard 'special act' of God.

The human mind has an additional function for Lewis, in making the Christian miracles more likely, or open to an impartial hearing. That man is a combinant creature, a rational soul informing a living body, suggests the greater 'combinant reality' of the Incarnation.

> What can be meant by 'God becoming man'? In what sense is it conceivable that eternal self-existent Spirit, basic Fact-hood, should be so combined with a natural human organism as to make one person? And this would be a fatal stumbling block if we had not already discovered in every human being a more than natural activity (the act of reasoning) and therefore presumably a more than natural agent is thus united with a part of Nature: so united that the composite creature calls itself 'I' and 'Me'.[12]

Hence, it is maintained that every person contains or constitutes his own model for discourse about the Incarnation. Lewis takes the mind - body problem, and uses it to illuminate

the God - Man problem. He says,

> I am not, of course, suggesting that what happened when God became Man was simply another instance of this process. In other men a supernatural creature thus becomes, in union with the natural creature, one human being. In Jesus, it is held, the Supernatural Creator did so.[13]

This union is over and above the fact that Jesus possessed a human mind informing his living body, as is the case with all of us. In two ways then, the human mind functions as an indicator of the genuinely miraculous; by requiring an act of God to account for its reality, and by providing a model for discourse about the Union of God the Son with humanity.

> We cannot conceive how the Divine Spirit dwelled within the created and human spirit of Jesus: but neither can we conceive how His human spirit, or that of any man, dwells within his natural organism. What we can understand, if the Christian doctrine is true, is that our own composite existence is not the sheer anomaly it might seem to be, but a faint image of the Divine Incarnation itself - the same theme in a very minor key.[14]

There is a clear sense in which, for Lewis, a literally miraculous conception at the beginning of Jesus' life will not be an anomaly. God already acts in Nature, and acts in a special way to create the rational element of each person. The miraculous conception is from this perspective merely an additional act of God going somewhat beyond what He ordinarily does, by dispensing with the total contribution of a human father.

> No woman ever conceived a child . . . without Him. But once, and for a special purpose, He dispensed with that long line which is His instrument. . . . Once the great glove of Nature was taken off His hand. . . . There was of course a unique reason for it. That time He was creating not simply a man but the Man who was to be Himself.[15]

Miracle, Resurrection and Ascension

There is a tension between Lewis' belief that the miraculous begins at the conception as God becomes man, and his belief that the Resurrection is the first fact in Christianity. He does not explore the connection between these two claims in this book. He writes,

> The first fact in the history of Christendom is a number of people who say they have seen the Resurrection. If they had died without making anyone else believe this 'gospel', no gospels would ever have been written.[16]

One immediately wants to ask how the conception and the other miracles of Jesus can in reality precede the Resurrection if it is <u>absolutely</u> 'the first fact'. This at least raises questions

about the historical character of the earlier miracles, in that they could reasonably be expected to shed some fore-light on the Resurrection to come, especially as Jesus also announced it to his followers. Lewis even writes,

> What we call the 'gospels', the narratives of Our Lord's life and death, were composed later for the benefit of those who had already accepted the gospel. They were in no sense the basis of Christianity: they were written for those already converted. The miracle of the Resurrection and the theology of that miracle comes first: the biography comes later as a comment upon it.[17]

Throughout Miracles, he works with the presumption that the miracles all come to the reader on a par with this 'first fact', and asks no questions about tension (internal to any one Gospel) between Jesus as a worker of the most profound miracles who announces His Resurrection beforehand, but for which his disciples remain totally unprepared. All he does say is to acknowledge that

> Nothing could be more unhistorical than to pick out selected sayings of Christ from the gospels and to regard those as the datum and the rest of the New Testament as a construction upon it.[18] (Italics mine)

When he says,

> 'The New Testament writers speak as if Christ's achievement in rising from the dead was the first event of its kind in the whole history of the universe,'[19]

we want to ask about his references to the Incarnation and the miraculous conception. Are these not equally candidates for 'uniqueness', or would there indeed have been nothing at all to announce of Jesus' origins had there been no Resurrection at the end? Lewis could, I think, respond to these questions and still maintain the priority of the Resurrection, but they remain issues that he does not respond to in this work.

Turning to the Resurrection itself, we find that Lewis stands very firmly in the tradition maintained by Aquinas and Newman. He stresses the fact that the Resurrection includes that in which Jesus died and was buried; his body.

> We also, in our heart of hearts, tend to slur over the risen manhood of Jesus, to conceive Him, after His death, simply returning into Deity, so that the Resurrection would be no more than the reversal or undoing of the Incarnation. That being so, all references to the risen body make us uneasy: they raise awkward questions.[20]

He also stresses that the Resurrection is not confined to the few appearances and accounts of the same that mark its early moments. Resurrection is equally a state or condition into which Jesus has entered.

> The 'Resurrection' to which they bore witness was, in fact, not the action of rising from the dead but the state of having risen; a state, as they held, attested by intermittent meetings during a limited period.[21]

Lewis accepts the accounts of his passage through the closed doors, the eating of food, and even the initial non-recognition by the disciples as genuine reminiscence and indicators of the Resurrection reality.[22] Lewis speaks of Jesus being the first member of a new Nature. 'It is the picture of a new human nature, and a new Nature in general, being brought into existence.' His body still involves 'some sort of spatial relations' even though it is 'differently related to space and probably to time.'[23] This, at least, suggests that we can only understand a little of the Resurrection reality itself, and that our anthropology of the risen state will remain somewhat rudimentary.

Lewis allows two possible responses to the Resurrection narratives. 'The local appearances, the eating, the touching, the claim to be corporeal, must be either reality or sheer illusion.'[24]

In the outline of Aquinas' and Newman's beliefs about Jesus' miracles, I have referred to the sense in which Jesus' Resurrection 'miraculized' his own person. Something like this is again involved in Lewis' references to a New or Renewed Nature. Again, Lewis never discusses the Miracles as isolated wonders, but as part of the total event, for which this is the goal.

> There is no question in Christianity of arbitrary interferences just scattered about. It relates not a series of disconnected raids on Nature but the various steps of a strategically coherent invasion - an invasion which intends complete conquest and 'occupation'.[25]

It is in this sense that the Ascension is scarcely an additional wonder, but the final exhibition of the goal achieved at Resurrection. It manifests in a new way the reality of the risen state. The Ascension marks the end (St Paul excepting[26]), of the appearances of the risen one. Lewis does acknowledge that on simply textual attestation, one could dispense with the Ascension, as it did not form part of the earliest text of Mark, and only appears once in Luke-Acts. He defends its reality by appealing to the character of the Resurrection appearances. Given their reality, it seems that something like an Ascension becomes both possible, and indeed necessary.

The Ascension indicates that the risen body and soul of Jesus has a 'history before it which is in view from the first moment of the Resurrection; it is presently going to become different or go somewhere else'.[27] For Lewis, it is certain that

the disciples saw Jesus depart with something like a vertical movement away from the earth. This local movement

> presents greater difficulties to the modern mind than any other part of Scripture. For here, surely, we get the implication of all those primitive crudities to which I have said the Christians are not committed: the vertical assent like a balloon, the local heaven, the decorated chair to the right of the Father's throne.[28]

Where Newman asserted that the Ascension showed heaven to be a certain fixed place, Lewis writes that we must retain the Ascension because the Resurrection appearances are not those of a ghost, phantom, or an hallucination, but of an objective entity. As such, something must happen to <u>it</u>, <u>it</u> must go somewhere. And again, 'something happened to it after it ceased to appear.'[29] Lewis, unlike Strauss, never asks where Jesus went to on disappearing after each Resurrection appearance.

Reminiscent of the tradition that we have already encountered, Lewis distinguishes between the Divine Nature which neither leaves nor has need of returning to Heaven, and the human nature which is united to that Divinity, not just at the Ascension, but all along.[30]

Lewis has the capacity to accept that the accounts refer to a literal Ascension, in which the glorified 'but still in some sense corporeal Christ withdrew into a different mode of being about six weeks after the crucifixion.'[31] While 'sitting at the right hand of God' must be taken as a metaphor, 'the statement that the holy Shape went up and vanished does not permit the same treatment.'[32]

The sense of impossibility is modified, or restrained, because Lewis does not set the discussed event within this nature as we know it. It is not <u>simply</u> a case of a man going up, nor of a momentary miracle, an interruption of this nature, after which normality returns.

> We are discussing only what the 'joint' between the Old Nature and the new, the precise moment of transition would look like.[33]

Lewis maintains that we have no reason to object to their saying that they 'saw first a short vertical movement and then a vague luminosity . . . and then nothing'.[34] Only this aspect of the departing is accessible to the disciples. Only this has any effect on 'the region from which the traveller is departing', and the rest has nothing to do with the realm in which the disciples exist. We are reminded of Aquinas speaking about the Resurrection

transcending our common knowledge at its starting point and its term (Vol. 55, 3a.55, 3, p.43). Lewis' statement that the three-dimensionality of our space is probably no longer appropriate to the risen Christ[35] serves to limit what we may know of the Ascension reality. This sense of space is a basic pre-condition or form for human experience, not something we can simply dispense with, for the sake of some 'higher knowledge'. Kant, for example, writes, 'Space is a necessary apriori representation, which underlies all outer representations.'[36]

I have already referred to Lewis' claim that the union of body and soul in the complete person provides a natural analogue for the Incarnation itself. Here, he says that our ordinary perception of the sky provides a similar imaginative preparation for the Ascension.

> And when God made space and worlds that move in space, and clothed our world with air, and gave us such eyes and such imaginations as those we have, He knew what the sky would mean to us. And since nothing in His work is accidental, if He knew, He intended. We cannot be certain that this was not indeed one of the chief purposes for which Nature was created: still less that it was not one of the chief reasons why the withdrawal was allowed to affect human senses as a movement upwards.[37]

However, it would have to be said that both these observations are somewhat independent of the issue of historicity. They would provide equally as good support for the view that in forming these stories, an appeal was being made to man that did not simply depend on what happened on a particular occasion. One would have to depend on specific evidence to maintain that the events and occasions really possessed this historical reality, and did not merely represent the appropriation of available mythical motifs.

Jesus' Miracles

All the miracles from conception through to Ascension, are the work of the same God, who has become Incarnate. To that extent, they belong together, and tend to exhibit the overall purpose of this complete act of God. For Lewis, the miracles, at whatever part of this arc they are encountered, exhibit the rationale of the universal redemption of Nature that is implicit in a literal Incarnation. There is more to a proper response to miracle than arriving at a simple either/or conclusion about testimony for a string of unusual events. There is also a sense in which the goal of his life, Resurrection, supersedes issues raised by miracles along the way.

> The doctrine of a universal redemption spreading outwards from the redemption of Man, mythological as it will seem to modern minds, is in reality far more philosophical than any theory which holds that God, having once entered Nature, should leave her, and leave her substantially unchanged, or that the glorification of one creature could be realised without the glorification of the whole system. . . . The union between God and Nature in the Person of Christ admits no divorce. He will not go out of Nature again and she must be glorified in all ways which this miraculous union demands.[38]

The reference to the whole system being glorified does suggest that the issue cannot be confined to Jesus' miracles alone. 'Glorification' will be going on at other times and places, and in this sense, Lewis has some points in common with Newman. Miracle has a wider locus than the life of Jesus. Lewis writes

> You are probably quite right in thinking you will never see a miracle done . . . God does not shake miracles into Nature at random as if from a pepper-caster. They come on great occasions: they are found at the great ganglions of history - not of political or social history, but of that spiritual history which cannot be fully known by men. If your own life does not happen to be near one of those great ganglions, how should you expect to see one? If we were heroic missionaries, apostles, or martyrs, it would be a different matter.[39]

Between conception and Ascension, Jesus' miracles are acts of God Incarnate doing suddenly, immediately and locally, what God has done, or will do on a widespread, even universal scale.

> Each miracle writes for us in small letters something God has already written, or will write, in letters almost too large to be noticed, across the whole canvass of Nature. They focus at a particular point either God's actual, or His future operations on the universe.[40]

Depending on whether they focus the things God has always been doing, or the things that he will do in the glorification of Nature, Lewis classifies them as miracles of the Old or the New Creation. They anticipate the formation of powers to be had by all people who attain to the Resurrection,

> Christ's isolation is not that of a prodigy but of a pioneer. He is the first of His kind; He will not be the last.[41]

Lewis includes miracles of fertility, healing, destruction, and some miracles of dominion over the inorganic miracles of the Old Creation - focussing what God has always been doing.

The miraculous conception, which we have already discussed in the context of what God does in every conception, is a miracle of fertility and a miracle of the Old Creation. The conversion of water into wine and the two feeding miracles are also fertility miracles.

As the God of Israel was said to be the reality behind Genius and Venus, so Jahweh 'is the reality behind the false god Bacchus.'[42] The Cana miracle proclaims that the God of Israel, 'who has through all these centuries given us wine to gladden the heart of man' is present. As a miracle of the Old Creation, it is the same God giving wine who has always given wine, though here by a miracle, and there, according to the operations of Nature. The result is the same, the God is the same, but God acts by different means: - once, without any means, as it were; and ordinarily by Nature - His ordinary means.

> Every year, as part of the Natural order, God makes wine. He does so by creating a vegetable organism that can turn water, soil and sunlight into a juice which will, under proper conditions, become wine.[43]

Hence, the question of whether miracles are possible is approached by the further, contextual question of whether grapevines, water, sunlight, nutrients and even the vigneron and his tools can be properly described as the instruments by which God makes wine. It is a whole way of looking at and living in the world that is being discussed, in which the question of miracle really occupies the place of a very small sub-section. It is the primary consideration of natural things as creatures that provides much of the scope for concluding that miracles are at least possible, and that they make sense when taken to be literal events.

Lewis' statement, 'Every year . . . God makes wine' should not be understood to collapse the reality of things and processes involved, into a mere mask for the only real agent, God Himself. Unlike Aquinas, however, he does not formally discuss this dual aspect of the world, in which particular things and God are both said to be causal agents - the former being both real and subservient to God as their Creative ground and cause.

Lewis makes the metaphor of 'short-circuit' work very hard where he writes,

> God, now incarnate, short circuits the process: makes wine in a moment: uses earthenware jars instead of vegetable fibres to hold the water. But uses them to do what He is always doing. The miracle consists in the short cut; but the event to which it leads is the usual one.[44]

One cannot overstress the 'in a moment' factor. The short cut does not consist of God speeding up the processes involved and still going through natural stages of production, only quicker. Where miracle is not involved, the idea of a short cut can convey something like that. Instead of going through five catalytic

reactions, the chemical breakthrough reduces it to two. Instead of driving through a dozen circuitously-placed villages at a crawl, the bypass road takes you through two regional towns. But in the miracle, there is no intervening pathway at all, no natural process involved, and it is marked by the absence of the natural ingredients necessary for these processes to take place.

The two feeding miracles are treated in the same way as the wine miracle, and apart from noting in passing that there are two feeding stories, he makes nothing at all of any issues that might be raised by there being <u>two</u> of them. His remarks are confined to the fertility theme.

> Every year God makes a little corn into much corn: the seed is sown and there is an increase . . . That same day He also multiplied fish. Look down into every bay and almost every river. The swarming, undulating fecundity shows He is still at work 'thronging the seas with spawn innumerable'. . . . And now, that day, at the feeding of the thousands, incarnate God does the same: does close and small, under His human hands, a workman's hands, what He has always been doing in the seas, the lakes and the little brooks.[45]

Again, we must be cautious about 'doing what He has always been doing'. In the first place, God has not been making dried fish and baked bread grow or multiply. He has not been making bread in the same way that He is said to have been making corn into much corn. There is a sense in which the act in Jesus' hands is distinctly different from anything that God otherwise does. What is the same is that at the end of the natural and human process in which grain is made into bread, and fish is cooked or dried, we have the same as what Jesus is said to have brought about here. Lewis is saying that both are the same making and doing because both are done by the same God - done differently as it were.

Healing miracles are described in a similar way. It is the same God who heals in every case, whether it be by Nature or by miracle. Lewis does allow that we cannot simply maintain that every healing miracle in the Gospels would be a proper miracle.[46] The main point is that he identifies the factor present and operative in every healing with the factor present in miraculous healing. I am not convinced that he has in fact drawn a sharp enough distinction between what pertains to the miracle, and what is proper to ordinary healing.

> There is a sense in which no doctor ever heals. The doctors themselves would be the first to admit this. The magic is not in the medicine but in the patient's body - in the . . . recuperative or self-corrective energy of Nature. What the treatment does is to simulate Natural functions or to remove what hinders them. We speak for convenience of the doctor or the dressing, healing a cut. But in another sense every cut heals itself. . . . That same mysterious force which we call gravitational when it steers the planets and biochemical when it heals a live body, is the efficient cause of all recoveries. And that energy proceeds from God in the first instance. All who are cured are cured by Him, not merely in the sense that His providence provides them with medical assistance and wholesome environments, but also in the sense that their very tissues are repaired by the far-descended energy which, flowing from Him, energises the whole system of Nature.[47]

I have a number of difficulties with this apology offered on behalf of healing miracles, apology which may again be capable of being set to one side without detracting from the question of miracle itself. In the first place, Lewis seems to suggest that 'biochemical' and 'gravitational' are somewhat arbitrary terms that in fact refer to the same force. Furthermore, 'that same mysterious force' is somewhat hard to place on a scale indicating its place as Creator or creature. It is called 'an energy proceeding from God', or 'far-descended energy flowing from Him'. Is this energy a creature, or a property of creatures that is therefore amenable to scientific inquiry? I cannot see that it is if it is the same factor that is responsible for miracles, and seemingly, he means the power to be God Himself:

> But once He did it visibly to the sick in Palestine, a Man meeting with men. . . . The power that was behind all healings put on a face and hands.[48]

Calming the storm is a miracle of the Old Creation. Here, Jesus does 'what God has often done before', bringing storms to an end.

> God made Nature such that there would be both storms and calms: in that way all storms have been stilled by God . . . There is really no difficulty about adapting the weather conditions of the rest of the world to this one miraculous calm.[49]

Lewis provides an analogy. He can stop a storm in his room by closing the window - and Nature accommodates the new situation. It will be <u>as if</u> a window were shut over the lake. But, there was nothing like a literal window over the lake, and in one sense there are no similarities between a vocal command addressed to wind and waves, and the act of putting a physical barrier in place to stop the wind! In this sense, it is not at all helpful to liken the miracle to the human act of stopping a draught. For in the

one case, the act makes perfect, natural sense, but in the other, what idea can we have of an apparently human command influencing the non-rational elements of wind and waves? At least the ancient explanations of command to a storm demon, or address to an angelic being with power over the elements, included this dimension of the act. Lewis' analogy does not then illuminate the miraculous dimension but depends on a reference to a natural occasion of effective action that is in fact totally different to the case in hand. In the same way, his likening the miracle to what God has always been doing does not really help us to understand the act that involves this human command.

> When Christ stills the storm He does what God has often done before. . . . It is unphilosophical, if you have once accepted the Grand Miracle, to reject the stilling of the storm.[50]

I can only understand this to mean that the human command of Christ effectively engages the Power of God the Son which has a proper jurisdiction over the weather. I do not think he is saying that Christ's human command happens to coincide with weather conditions that God had long ago pre-arranged, because there is a reference to Christ actually doing something here - really stilling the storm.

Lewis does not describe Peter's walking on the water with Jesus as a miracle of the Old Creation. 'God had not made the Old Nature, the world before the Incarnation of such a kind that water could support a human body.' But equally, we might reply that neither had he made the weather conditions subject to human command, which they were when Jesus addressed the elements. Lewis included the storm calming in the Old Creation miracles because Jesus did what God is always doing - calming storms. There is however, no real distinction between calming the storm and walking on the water at this point. It is as conceivable to me that during the storm, Jesus could have addressed Peter and said, 'You command the winds and the waves' - as conceivable as Peter being enabled to step out of the boat onto the water. In that regard, the 'historical accident' that Peter was enabled (partly) to do the one, but not invited to do the other, calls into question the distinction between miracles of Old and New Creation.

Lewis maintains that calming the storm is an example of what God has always been doing, while walking on the water is a foretaste of a Nature that is still in the future.[51] But the really prior and significant point seems to me to be that in both

cases the man Jesus does what is beyond the capacities of man as such to do. A case could as easily be made out that calming the storm was a miracle of the New Creation because here, the man Jesus did what all people in the New Creation will have the power to do - subject the weather to their will and circumstances. Regardless of the question of the historical reality of the miracles in question, Lewis' classification of them is shown to be somewhat arbitrary.

Lewis' distinctions at this point do not in fact take us far at all in any quest to recover the literally miraculous in Jesus' life. They do not begin to touch on the issues raised by attempting to form a uniform depiction of the disciples as witnesses of the genuinely miraculous, or by the absence of the miracle of Peter on the water from the other Gospels. Though Peter joined Jesus on the water, and presumably gained first-hand experience of the Resurrection life of the New Nature, he never acquires any capacity to anticipate the future that Jesus announces for himself, and comprehends nothing of Jesus' own capacity for Resurrection. A reasonable case can be made out that this kind of apparent internal inconsistency in the narrative tells as much against the historical reality of the event, as do~~es~~ issues pertaining to the event itself.

We saw that for Lewis, the mind - brain relationship functioned as a natural analogue for Incarnation, and that the perceptual and imaginative response to the sky prepared us for the reality of Ascension. He also maintains that the mind - brain relationship suggests the kind of principle involved in walking on the water.

> In the Walking on the Water we see the relations of spirit and Nature so altered that Nature can be made to do whatever spirit pleases. . . . If we are in fact spirits, not Nature's offspring, then there must be some point (probably the brain) at which created spirit even now can produce effects on matter not by manipulation or technics but simply by the wish to do so. If that is what you mean by Magic then Magic is a reality manifested every time you move your hand or think a thought.[52]

The miraculous resuscitations of the dead are included in the miracles of the New Creation, whose chief examples remain Jesus' own goal of Resurrection and Ascension.

One day, God will raise all mankind at the general Resurrection and transform them into the 'natural' likeness of Christ as He now is. The raising of Lazarus is God doing small

and close, in a lesser and purely anticipatory fashion what He will do in 'the glorious Resurrection of the New Humanity'.[53] As it happened, however, the restoration of Lazarus was a mere reversal, and the tendency of the organic to revert to the inorganic at death was turned around. At the general Resurrection, there will be 'a rush of matter towards organisation at the call of spirits which require it'.[54] The Lazarus incident merely counters the otherwise irreversible natural laws of 'irreversible death and irreversible entropy' - what St Paul calls the futility or vanity of Nature.

Lewis says little about Jesus' exorcistic activity here. Demonic activity is the work of 'powerful, non-human beings, supernatural but created'.[55] Lewis does not say that each case encountered in the Gospels is an example of this kind of activity, but having the entities to have it so, they are hardly going to be left idle. At the same time, he speaks of the pseudo-science of demonology, and could be quite capable of allowing that what is the work of a demon in one culture may be more specifically described as a bacterium or virus or mental illness in another. More significant is the perception he shares with Newman, that Nature has 'the air of a good thing spoiled'. The spoiling is due to the literal sins of man, and of the angels.

Jesus really did wither the figtree. It was 'an acted parable, a symbol of God's sentence on all that is "fruitless" and specially . . . on the official Judaism of that age.'[56] But God has always been the 'God of the death of organisms'.

> A forest a thousand years deep is still collectively alive because some trees are dying and others growing up. His human face, turned with negation in its eyes upon that one fig tree, did once what His unincarnate action does to all trees. No tree died that year in Palestine, or any year anywhere except because God did - or rather ceased to do - something to it.[57]

Partial Appraisal

There are a number of areas in which Lewis' response to miracles is obviously limited. Some of these are connected with the scope of the book itself, which is directed primarily to the presuppositions and 'prejudices' said to be brought against reports of the miraculous. On the other hand, this limitation never seems to have suggested to Lewis that he ought to have refrained from giving an actual interpretation of the

Gospel miracle stories until he had gone on to cover the rest of the issues involved in a proper response to them. The book is marked by a total non-response to issues connected with differences from Synoptic Gospel to Synoptic Gospel (the location of Peter on the water in Matthew alone), and from the Synoptics to John (all the issues connected with the wine miracle and the raising of Lazarus being found only here). But at the same time, he does not hesitate to treat the miracles as if they are on a simple historical continuum that the four Gospels simply place before us, and which become accessible once the bias against miracle is removed.

Hence, we can see the limitations to his claim: 'My work ends here. If after reading it, you now turn to study the historical evidence for yourself, begin with the New Testament and not with books about it.'[58] For Lewis, this injunction carries the presumptive force that in turning to the New Testament, a fairly non-problematical miraculous history will emerge, to which we are given access by the Evangelists. That is also the claim made in the following observations on the differences between Old Testament myth and mythical-miraculous history in the New.

> My present view - which is tentative and liable to any amount of correction - would be that just as, on the factual side, a long preparation culminates in God's becoming incarnate as Man, so, on the documentary side, the truth first appears in <u>mythical</u> form and then by a long process of condensing or focusing finally becomes incarnate as History. . . . The Hebrews, like other people, had mythology; but as they were the chosen people so their mythology was the chosen mythology - the mythology chosen by God to be the vehicle of the earliest sacred truths, the first step in that process which ends in the New Testament where truth has become completely historical. Whether we can ever say with certainty where, in this process of crystallisation, any particular Old Testament story falls, is another matter. I take it that the memoirs of David's court come at one end of the scale and are scarcely less historical than St. Mark or Acts; and that the Book of Jonah is at the opposite end. It should be noted that on this view (a) Just as God, in becoming Man, is "emptied" of His glory, so the truth, when it comes down from the "heaven" of myth to the "earth" of history, undergoes a certain humiliation. Hence the New Testament is, and ought to be, more prosaic, in some ways less splendid, than the Old; just as the Old Testament is and ought to be less rich in many kinds of imaginative beauty than the Pagan mythologies. (b) Just as God is none the less God by being Man, so the Myth remains Myth even when it becomes Fact. The story of Christ demands from us, and repays, not only a

> religious and historical but also an imaginative response.[59]

This presumption of simple, accessible, if not mimetic history presented by the Evangelists seems to lie behind the references to Joseph with which we began our survey of Lewis' beliefs about Jesus' miracles.

In this partial appraisal, I merely want to list factors that Lewis' work does not respond to in sufficient depth.

1. The presumption that the miraculous, from conception through to Ascension will lie on a simple historical continuum.

2. That the mode of presentation includes a basically mimetic element, in which for example, we are given literal insight into the psyche of St Joseph and his response to the miraculous.

3. The real tension between the primacy of Resurrection and the miraculous that precedes it, a tension not properly responded to, chiefly in his failure to consider the disciples as apparently unwitting participants in events leading to a somewhat obvious Resurrection. Given the miracle of his origin and the wonders worked along the way, how could they expect anything but Resurrection?

4. The total silence on differences from Gospel to Gospel.

Other subjects that Lewis touches on in his apology for miracles may in fact be peripheral to the extent that the case for miracles does not depend on the truth or falsity of claims made. Lewis' sharp distinction between mind and matter, and his use of this distinction to mount an appeal to a special, somewhat miraculous act of God to form the human person, may be somewhat incidental to the case. Should the specific properties of sperm and ova turn out to fully convey all material needed for nascent human life, the general theistic claim about created things deriving their powers from God would remain as before. This does not depend on drawing absolute qualitative distinctions between the kinds of thing said to be created by God. His belief that our knowledge of or confidence in the existence of things in the external world is based on inferences from 'immediate sensations'[60] is another example of an outlook that can be safely shed without detriment to a defence of miracles. 'Immediate sensations' might turn out to have as many problems with 'entity-status' as miracles.

For Newman, we saw that it was important to stress the sense in which miracles were not simply disruptions of God's order in the world, but manifestations of His higher order and purposes. My principal dissatisfaction with Lewis' beliefs is that he does not allow sufficient difference to exist between the natural and the miraculous. We found a constant reference to God 'doing the same thing' or 'same act' in the miraculous and the natural cases. Lacking was any emphasis on the sense in which they are patently and disturbingly different. Though there seems to be the same end result and the same God involved, there all similarities cease, and incomprehensible differences take over. Lewis constantly gives the impression that miracles are something that we can in fact understand, because of their conformity to natural reality which we do comprehend, and comprehend as God's work. There is very much a sense of the obvious about miracles in Miracles, even, we may say, a tendency to blur the distinction between Creator and Creation. This was most apparent in his treatment of the healing miracles, and the extent to which they were, in fact, effectively the same as natural healings. It was also apparent in the final miracle to which we referred, the withering of the fig tree. Here, he claimed that Jesus did once what God's unincarnate action does to all trees, and that all trees die because God does or ceases to do something to them. I find this very hard to understand. For example, when a tree dies because of a parasitic invasion of its root system, it is not at all obvious that the unincarnate action of God is doing anything at all. It is even less obvious that Jesus, in looking at the tree 'with negation in his eyes' is doing anything at all that resembles this more natural fate. And again, what has God ceased to do to the naturally living tree when the parasite kills its root system? I confess that I do not know how to answer these questions, but more fundamentally, I am not sure whether we are any more concerned with either botany or theology, or a curious mix of the two, in which imagination has got the upper hand. Looking at a tree with 'negation' in one's eyes is a very strange activity for a man to engage in, and the impression given, that we somehow understand what this man did to the tree, turns out to be false on closer inspection. Neither 'looking with negation' nor saying the words 'May no one eat fruit from you again', can be understood as anything like a reasonable thing for a man to do. Given that in this case, they are made effective by the power of

God the Son, this in no way makes the miraculous act 'the same' as what befalls other trees that die. It remains disturbingly and overwhelmingly different.

Attempts to vindicate the literally miraculous need to stress, equally, aspects of miracle that differ from natural reality. What it must not do, which I feel Lewis has done, is to blur this distinction and somewhat amalgamate the natural and the miraculous.

I conclude that there are substantial limitations to the value of Lewis' approach to miracles. Chief amongst these is the presumption, strongly-felt throughout his work, that, we have once agreed with his 'preliminary' or contextual considerations, the four Gospels themselves will raise no obstacles against the belief that Jesus really did all the miracles contained therein. This presumption dominates his work, and it is inadequate not even to refer in passing to significant differences in the miracle-material from Gospel to Gospel.

Again, there is no sign of any attention being paid to the enigma that miracle generates within the internal narrative of a Gospel, and where such extraordinary events achieve so very little (see Chapter VIII). I would not presume to move from his 'preliminary' considerations (defensible or not) to something like the specific interpretations that he gives. Issues raised by the Gospels themselves must be attended to - as in the form of the following hypothetical question. Even if we assume that, in theory, miracles are conceivable and possible, what issues do the four Gospels raise that are themselves obstacles for any belief that Jesus really did these things? Even cursory attention to a question like this would have greatly enhanced the value of his work - though it might have led to a revision of some of his conclusions.

CHAPTER V

DAVID HUME: THE MIRACLES REJECTED

The Specific Miracles

By beginning with a survey of the particular miracles to which Hume objects, we set parameters to the study of his general account of evidence evaluation and follow a procedure that we have adopted in each of our chapters.* In these concrete examples, we do see what the wider discussion of his principles of inquiry is focussed on. In Section X of 'An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding', the following miracles are objected to.

The Dead Restored to Life

Hume refers to this kind of miracle when giving an example that illustrates the definition of miracle itself.

> A miracle is a violation of the laws of nature; and as a firm and unalterable experience has established these laws, the proof against a miracle, from the very nature of the fact, is as entire as any argument from experience can possibly be imagined. . . . it is a miracle, that a dead man should come to life; because that has never been observed in any age or country. There must, therefore, be a uniform experience against every miraculous event, otherwise the event would not merit that appellation.[1]

Hume extends the discussion of the dead coming to life with an account of a miracle, which, had it happened, would have enjoyed the benefits of a high degree of attestation and notoriety. When distinguishing between a strange event with an as yet unknown cause ('from the first of January 1600 . . . a total darkness over the whole earth for eight days'), and a miracle, he

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* Recent, comprehensive discussions of the seventeenth and eighteenth century settings, and of Hume's arguments, are found in J. C. A. Gaskin, Hume's Philosophy of Religion (London: Macmillan, 1978), and R. M. Burns, The Great Debate on Miracles: From Joseph Glanvill to David Hume (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 1981).

constructs the hypothetical case of Queen Elizabeth dying on the first of January 1600 and reviving one month later.[2]

Miracles Exceeding the Rational Sense or 'Force' of a Command.

In the same place as the first reference to raising the dead, Hume adds a note on[a]/different kind of miracle. Here, the miracle does not lie in the material result, but in the manner by which the result is achieved. Thus, it is perfectly natural that the sick get better, that a healthy person fall down dead, that the clouds should send rain and the winds blow. These natural events constitute miracles when they do not happen by nature, but when commanded by 'a person, claiming a divine authority'. They are miracles because

> nothing can be more contrary to nature than that the voice or command of a man should have such an influence.[3]

This principle, as we shall see, was developed by Strauss, for whom it formed a scale of 'decreasing-conceivability-of-event'. As the possibility of a rational response to a human command diminished, so the event became less likely. The scale thus 'graduated' accounts of possession, those ill with gross physical complaints, the dead being restored - and on into the miracles where inanimate nature is commanded. In each case, the possibility of response to a (merely) human utterance diminishes, until it finally disappears. Hume's examples are readily taken as an oblique reference to Jesus' miracles, where a number of states like these are brought about by an apparently human command.

The miraculous element is located in that feature of the human command whereby it achieves what its rational sense or 'force' cannot of itself achieve.

Miracles Exceeding the Properties of Natural Objects or Actions.

Hume cites Vespasian's cures of a blind man by means of his spittle, and a lame man by means of his touch.[4] His objections seem to come to rejecting the notion that acts of spitting and touching can have a restorative effect. Whereas in the second group of miracles, the objection was to a speech-act achieving things beyond its cognitive bounds, the third is to what we may loosely term 'pre-rational' acts (spitting, touching) having a greater effect than a natural context would suggest.

The two miracles to which he refers are significant because of the level of supporting evidence that he allows for them. He

begins by calling it 'One of the best attested miracles in all profane history', and refers to Tacitus as

> that fine historian . . . a contemporary writer, noted for candour and veracity, and withal, the greatest and most penetrating genius, perhaps of all antiquity; and so free from any tendency to credulity.[5]

He refers to Tacitus working from eye-witnesses of the fact, where no hope of reward existed, and to 'the public nature of the facts related'.

Having magnified the example in this way, he immediately introduces the conclusion, 'it will appear, that no evidence can well be supposed stronger for so gross and so palpable a falsehood'.[6]

Throughout 'Of Miracles', Hume goes out of his way to choose some examples of miracles which are accompanied by seemingly excellent testimony. He almost seeks to place himself in the most disadvantageous position by setting the discussion amongst the best examples* of miracles that can be brought against him. If, however,

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* One might wonder why Hume did not discuss, directly, Jesus' miracles as constituting 'the best examples'. Hume had reason to be cautious about overt criticisms of Jesus' miracles, and his judgements could best be left to be inferred. 'In 1733 Woolston died in prison on a charge of criminal blasphemy, and Chubb and Annet who survived to challenge Sherlock drew abuse and ridicule upon themselves.' J. C. A. Gaskin, Hume's Philosophy of Religion, p. 107. Hume probably had no desire to retrace Woolston's interpretation of the miracle stories, nor his fate; and a wide ranging criticism of specific miracle stories from Church history by Conyers Middleton appeared just before the Enquiry (1749), (Burns pp. 10-11) - though his Introductory Discourse had been published in 1747. Hume's method of proceeding is somewhat different, and he is more concerned with reaching a general conclusion to be applied to all miracle reports whatsoever - an argument to counter even 'the best' evidence. 'Nothing is so convenient as a decisive argument of this kind . . . I flatter myself, that I have discovered an argument of a like nature.'
('An Enquiry', X.1.86 p. 110).

there is doubt that particular examples are in fact well attested,* the point is covered by his construction of a hypothetical case (the Queen's restoration). The intention seems to be to provide an example of conditions permitting maximum scrutiny.

Ridiculous Miracles.

The miracle of the cathedral door-keeper, whose leg regrew, could be classified with the preceding miracles in that he 'recovered that limb by the rubbing of holy oil upon the stump'[7] - an example of an effect quite exceeding any natural medicinal property of oil!

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* A. Murray (trans.) Tacitus, Vol.IV (London: Henry Colburn and Richard Bentley, 1831), pp. 287, n. 1, maintains that it is 'not clear that Tacitus placed any faith in this extraordinary story', that there is a presumption of poor or lying motives in its being formed, refers to Vespasian's fear of ridicule and the likelihood that the sanctuary physicians had a hand in choosing susceptible candidates. Thus 'The story is not related by Tacitus with the air of a man who believed the fact.' However, in the following section, Tacitus simply recounts Vespasian's vision or 'bi-locationary' experience of Basilides (in the same sanctuary), and of Vespasian, that, 'He concluded therefore that the gods had favored him with a preternatural vision, and . . . he inferred an interpretation of the decrees of Heaven in favour of his future reign'. Tacitus seems to me to accept the former healings in the same light. His contemporary, Suetonius, simply narrates a long list of omens, prodigies and wonders which point Vespasian's way to the position of Emperor. ('Vespasian', in The Twelve Caesars, Gaius Suetonius Tranquillus, translated by Robert Graves, Penguin Books 1957, pp. 276-8). The list contains a mix of the extraordinary and the miraculous: 'Then a stray dog picked up a human hand at the cross-roads, which it brought into the room where Vespasian was breakfasting and dropped under the table; a hand being the symbol of power. . . . He also found a cypress-tree lying uprooted on his grandfather's farm, though there had been no gales to account for the accident; yet by the next day it had taken root again and was greener and stronger than ever' (p. 277). The healings to which Hume refers are then told as a part of the prodigious equipment and divine favour vested in Vespasian (almost, indeed authorizing his position) as emperor: 'Vespasian, still rather bewildered in his new role of Emperor, felt a certain lack of authority and of what might be called the divine spark yet both these attributes were granted him' (p. 278): - in the two acts of healing referred to. Graves writes of Suetonius, 'If his credulousness about omens and prodigies is discounted, he seems trustworthy enough'. (Foreword p. 7)

One senses that Hume considers this wonder to be even less credible than those attributed to Vespasian, where the eye and limb, though not functioning, were still intact. But again, the event in question is simply to be dismissed 'on the face of it'. Of Cardinal de Retz, who came across the man allegedly restored, he writes,

> He considered justly, that it was not requisite, in order to reject a fact of this nature, to be able accurately to disprove the testimony . . . He therefore concluded, like a just reasoner, that such an evidence carried falsehood upon the very face of it, and that a miracle, supported by any human testimony, was more properly a subject of derision than of argument.[8]

As with the previous example, Hume magnifies the circumstances of the apparent testimony that would, had the event been of a different kind, have tended towards acceptance of the fact. The man had served seven years in his position, was known to everybody in the town and at the church, had been seen for a long time wanting a leg, the restoration by the said means was vouched by all the canons of the church. Hume is moving towards the conclusion that, in the case of miracles, even the best testimony does not count.*

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* A somewhat similar, well attested and less bizarre miracle from even earlier times is recovered at the conclusion of Benedicta Ward's Miracles and The Medieval Mind: Theory, Record and Event 1000-1215 (London: Scholar Press, 1982), pp. 217-8, translated from a document in Canterbury Cathedral Library (Charta Antiqua C1303, dated 27 July 1445.) 'For since Alexander, son of Stephen, from the town of Aberdeen in Scotland being twenty four years old, suffered great pain from his feet that from birth were disgustingly worm-eaten, crippled with hidden ulcers in them . . . he knelt on his weak knees at the shrine of the holy Martyr Thomas and before the eyes of all men the glorious athlete of God restored his feet and soles so that he threw away his hated crutches on the second day of May . . . [and] was able to kick the ground lightly with joy and was able to walk away firmly and in good health. . . . Alexander took an oath on the sacrament in our presence that the miracle was a genuine cure and to this was added the oath of other worthy men . . . [including] John son of Thomas, who suddenly arrived as if by the clemency of divine providence from the same town in Scotland.'
The reference to the ulcers being 'hidden' is no doubt significant.

Well-attested, Contemporary Miracles

The fifth miracles objected to are the collection attributed to the deceased Abbé, Francois de Paris, often by the agency of his tomb - as Hume puts it, 'wrought in France upon the tomb of Abbé Paris'.* Amongst the miracles are included 'curing of the sick, giving sight to the blind and hearing to the deaf'. The miracles are proximate in time and place to Hume himself, and provided perfect opportunities for thorough examination, which, partly because of their role in religious controversy of the day, they were given. They seem to constitute Hume's choice of actual miracles for which the best possible testimony existed.**

> Many of the miracles were immediately proved upon the spot, before judges of unquestioned integrity, attested by witnesses of credit and distinction, in a learned age, on the most eminent theatre that is now in the world.9

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* Robert B. Kreiser, Miracles, Convulsions, and Ecclesiastical Politics in Early Eighteenth-Century Paris, (Princeton: Princeton University Press 1978), p. 93. 'Within a year of the burial [1727], Jérome-Nicolas de Paris erected a tomb in his brother's memory. The modest monument consisted of a large rectangular slab of black marble, raised slightly above the ground by four stone supports. There was just enough space left for a person, crawling on his stomach, to fit between the marble and the grave - an exercise which many were to perform in subsequent years.' Miracles began on the day of internment, before the actual burial. 'An elderly and illiterate woolworker, the widow Louise-Madeleine Reigney (or Beigney), who had met M. Francois several times in the parish and had watched him admiringly at the church of Saint-Médard as he stood in solitary meditation and prayer, went to the services to pay her respects to the deacon for having been such a great friend of the poor and the unfortunate. But she also had another reason for attending. Despite frequent and sincere invocation of divine power, she had until then been unable to obtain a cure for her arm, paralyzed for nearly twenty years. Approaching the bier, full of trust, she fell down on her knees, recited some prayers, embraced and kissed the deacon's feet - and went away cured.' (p. 91). Kreiser adds a note to the effect that her declaration (written by someone else for her) is dated 6 years after the event.

** Kreiser, Miracles, p. 399. 'In fact, orthodox defenders of the faith had been greatly embarrassed and unsettled by the amazingly strong evidence supporting the miraculous character of many of the Paris cures. They sought to rescue the Gospel miracles and to counter the sceptics by denying all similarity or connection between the accomplishment of Jesus Christ and the prodigies attributed to Francois de Paris. In the end, however, they could do so only by denying the evidence and by questioning the sufficiency and the reliability of all human testimony . . . Attempts to gainsay the miraculous nature of the Paris cures on the grounds of the deacon's doctrinal unorthodoxy proved equally unsatisfactory and unconvincing . . . the status of the miracles became increasingly precarious.'

As well, Hume notes that the reports of the miracles were widely circulated and vigorous opponents (Jesuits and civil magistrates) were never 'able distinctly to refute or detect them'. (The Jesuits would not be opposed to miracles as such, but to these miracles, with their anti-Papal dimensions. They had to their credit, the legitimate miracles of Francis Xavier, whose self-mortifications were hardly less extreme than Francois'.) Hume's appended note is largely concerned with magnifying the calibre of the witnesses and the quality of their testimony.

> Many of the miracles were proved immediately by witnesses before the officiality or bishop's court at Paris under the eye of Cardinal Noailles, whose character for integrity and capacity was never contested even by his enemies. . . . The Molinist party . . . soon found themselves overwhelmed by a cloud of new witnesses, one hundred and twenty in number, most of them persons of credit and substance in Paris, who gave oath for the miracle. This was accompanied with a solemn and earnest appeal to the parliament.[10]

He closes the additional note by referring to a miracle from the previous century, which yet had some connection with these miracles of the 1720s - the miracle worked on the eye of Pascal's niece.* Hume is generous in his praise of the participant and witnesses. He refers to the learning, genius and probity of the gentlemen and the austerity of the nuns of Port Royal. Pascal's niece's sanctity of life is well known. The famous Racine gives an account with

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* Of all the miracles claimed by and for Port Royal none was more cherished than the famous cure of Pascal's young niece, Marguerite Perrier, on March 24, 1656, just three months after her uncle had published the first of his Lettres Provinciales. Mlle. Perrier had been suffering for a long time from a serious and disfiguring lachrymal fistula in the corner of one eye. She was suddenly healed when a Holy Thorn recently presented to the sisters of Port-Royal-des-Champs where she was a pensionary, was simply touched to her ulcerous sore. Despite vehement Jesuit denunciations and attempts to explain it away, the miracle, supported by substantial medical evidence and duly authenticated a short time later by the diocesan authorities, made a profound impression on the public. . . . Within a few months the cures and other miracles attributed to the Holy Thorn multiplied to fourteen, and afterwards to eighty (Kreiser, p. 71). Mlle. Perrier survived for more than 70 further years between her miracle and those of the Abbé, in whose miracles and cause she was also a devoted believer. (Kreiser, n. 1, p. 71) Jansenist miracles abounded during the 1720s and by no means simply appeared with the decease of the Abbé. (see, pp. 74, 79-80)

'all the proofs, which a multitude of nuns, priests, physicians and men of the world, all of them of undoubted credit, could bestow on it'. The bishop of Tourney uses it to refute atheists and freethinkers. The queen regent of France (extremely prejudiced against Port Royal) sends her physician who is converted. The miracle saved the monastery from threatened destruction, and, had it been a cheat, it would have been detected. Hume concludes on the Jansenist miracles,

> And what have we to oppose to such a cloud of witnesses, but the absolute impossibility or miraculous nature of the events, which they relate? And this surely, in the eyes of all reasonable people, will alone be regarded as a sufficient refutation. [11]

Miracles of Scripture

Hume ends the section on miracles by introducing miracles from a source in which they had long been undoubted. Part of Newman's response to criticism of miracles in the Pentateuch is to stress the special role that being in the Word of God has, in forming an assent to their historicity. Hume, however, immediately contrasts the evidence for the miracles of part of Scripture (the Pentateuch) with the high-evidence factor that he has developed for other miracles, and finds them lacking. Unlike the residents of the Paris suburb and the still living priests and officials, one simply cannot go and question and re-question these ancient figures.

Not only will he not believe in those well-attested miracles, miracles even 'constructed' for the purpose of displaying the role of the strongest testimony; but when it comes to these Scriptural miracles, they too will be dismissed. For a reasonable person, they lack even the evidential force of good testimony.

> Here then we are first to consider a book, presented to us by a barbarous and ignorant people, written in an age when they were still more barbarous, and in all probability long after the facts which it relates, corroborated by no concurring testimony, and resembling those fabulous accounts, which every nation gives of its origin.[12]

On the simple basis of human reason responding to testimony, these miracles would be rejected - 'I desire any one to lay his hand upon his heart . . .' And this is the context of Hume's closing remarks that the Christian Religion cannot be defended by human reason, but only by Faith 'which subverts all the principles of his understanding, and gives him a determination to believe what is most contrary to custom and experience'.[13] That is, the Christian

believes in the occurrence of a special collection of miracles that come to him on far less evidence than can be obtained for many more recent wonders that are themselves, as often as not, disbelieved. Hume's principal point is that even given the best imaginable evidence, he would not believe in miracles - and the scripture miracles come with far less attestation than that. One can see at once why belief in some ecclesiastical miracles was important for Newman. Scriptural, even Gospel miracles, cannot stand alone.

Predicting the Future and Evaluating the Past

Hume's rejection of these six miracles, or kinds of miracle, comes at the end of a discussion of the evaluation of testimony for commonplace, then extraordinary, and finally, miraculous events.[14] He discusses a commonplace event (the weather), then a rare event (the first report of frost or ice to an Indian prince) and finally, the dead coming back to life, as a miracle proper.

The weather in June and December is first discussed[15] from the perspective of predicting or expecting particular conditions in any given week yet to come. On the basis of data collected since records began and one's own experience of the seasons, it is reasonable to expect better weather in any week of June than December - but one could easily be disappointed, and indeed, one expects to be mistaken on some occasions. Uncertainty was already built in owing to the known fact of the weather's variability in past weeks in June and December. The causes of the weather are many, varied, and often 'supposed'. Hume's initial conclusion, then, concerns the prediction of an event:

> so that, in our reasonings concerning matter of fact, there are all imaginable degrees of assurance, from the highest certainty to the lowest species of moral evidence.[16]

It is obvious, however, that Hume is completely assured, or capable of being assured about the weather in any past week in June or December - for he uses these certainties to form his mixed expectation about the future: 'it commonly informs us beforehand of the uncertainty, by that contrarety of events, which we may learn from a diligent observation'.[17] Hume identifies a ratio between known, past instances, that give a measure of the degree of expectation for the events yet to come. 'Infallible experience' promotes 'the last degree of assurance' and 'full proof of the future existence of that event'. A hundred instances for and fifty

against 'afford a doubtful expectation of any event'. It seems, that if this is all we have to go on and are confident that the same factors will hold on future trials, then this is substantially correct. Hume, however, in the discussion of miracles, is concerned with testimony for events that are said to have already happened. The questions about the six miracles do not concern the likelihood of their happening on any future occasion, but the likelihood of the testimony that we have for them turning out to be true: - as if, doubt existed as to someone's testimony that the weather was fine on June first 1700. Hume begins X.1.88 by linking this new concern, evaluating testimony for problematic, <u>past</u> events, with what he has already concluded about the predictability of problematic, <u>future</u> events from non-problematic past events.

> To apply these principles to a particular instance; we may observe, that there is no species of reasoning more common . . . than that which is derived from the testimony of men, and the reports of eye witnesses and spectators.[18]

In the earlier, predictive case of the weather, <u>the connection</u> between the one predicting and the events on the basis of which he formed his expectation, was not a problem - it was undoubted. Now, however, Hume is concerned with cases of human testimony 'whose connexion with any event seems, in itself, as little necessary as any other'[19] - and where the particular connection admits of doubt.

For Hume, the connection admits of doubt where there is 'the opposition of contrary testimony; from the character or number of the witnesses; from the manner of their delivering their testimony'.[20] But his principal concern is not with these factors, since, as we have already intimated, when discussing the miracles, he is consistently prepared to permit the testimony, from these respects, to be of the highest calibre.*

The principal factor in his initial rejection of testimony for past events, in his admitting of a doubtful connection between the testimony and the event, concerns <u>the degree of unusualness in the event itself</u> - and miracles lie at the end point of the progression that he traces out from commonplace, through the extraordinary.

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* Though it is somewhat convenient that the entire inner-court of Queen Elizabeth are of a sudden known to be knaves or liars simply because of the kind of event they now offer testimony to - their testimony here being, otherwise, the best ever available.

> Suppose, for instance, that the fact, which the testimony endeavours to establish, partakes of the extraordinary and the marvellous; in that case, the evidence, resulting from the testimony, admits of a diminution, greater or less, in proportion as the fact is more or less unusual.[21]

Hume believes that testimony for novel, unusual events tends towards a point beyond which we can no longer accept it. The 'weight' of the testimony is countered by the degree of departure from the normal that the event testified to exhibits, and a point is reached where the recipient of the testimony says, 'I should not believe such a story were it told me by Cato' - 'the incredibility of a fact, it was allowed, might invalidate so great an authority'.[22]

Hume does not clearly spell out the difference between predicting uncertain, future events and accepting testimony for rare, past events. But if, on the basis of indubitable, past trials, we had a ratio of one thousand supporting cases to one counter instance, and expected the next trial to be similar in all respects, we would hardly expect a second counter instance, though once having happened, there need be few reasons to doubt it. Why should one or two reports of miracles among the many non-miraculous events of the past be any less acceptable? For Hume, it has to be something to do with the event itself, whereby irremovable doubt holds between the testimony and the event(s) in question - doubt due to the kind of event, and not to the other factors by which we assess testimony. For Hume, miracle is never assessed simply as rare event.

A distinction between unusual, or rare, natural events, and miracles, is important to Hume. He discusses two examples where testimony for the former is involved. He refers to an Indian prince 'who refuses to believe the <u>first</u> relations concerning the effects of frost'[23] - water turning to ice, rendered capable of being walked upon.* It required more than initial testimony 'to engage his

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* J. Locke, <u>An Essay Concerning Human Understanding</u>, Abridged and Edited by A. S. Pringle-Pattison (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1924), IV. XV. 5, p. 336. 'As it happened to a Dutch ambassador, who entertaining the King of Siam with the particularities of Holland . . . told him, that the water in his country would sometimes, in cold weather, be so hard, that men walked upon it, and that it would bear an elephant . . . to which the King replied, 'Hitherto I have believed the strange things you have told me, because I look on you as a sober fair man; but now I am sure you lie.' See also, R. M. Burns' discussion of Hume's use of Locke's principles, <u>The Great Debate</u>, pp. 59-60. Locke differed from Hume in that he believed that Jesus' miracles occurred, that we could acquire an independent

assent to facts, that arose from a state of nature, with which he was unacquainted, and which bore so little analogy to those events of which he had had constant and uniform experience'.[24] Hume would readily allow that given further, separate instances of testimony, the Prince would do best to reconsider, and accept the testimony on authority; and he leaves ample room for some clever teacher to render it conformable to present experience - or else to take him to 'see water in Muscovy during the winter'. In a like vein, he considers an even more extraordinary event.

> Thus, suppose, all authors, in all languages, agree that, from the first of January 1600, there was a total darkness over the whole earth for eight days: suppose that the tradition of this extraordinary event is still strong and lively among the people: that all travellers, who return from foreign countries, bring us accounts of the same tradition, without the least variation or contradiction: it is evident, that our present philosophers, instead of doubting the fact, ought to receive it as certain, and ought to search for the causes whence it is derived.[25]

Here, three reasons are given as to why <u>this</u> testimony should be accepted. 1. The witnesses are widespread, and all agree, and no connivance is possible - (as the Indian prince would have discovered had he inquired of more than one Dutchman or Muscovite). 2. The event is presumed to have a cause or causes. 3. The event, while unusual, conforms to a wider principle: -

> The decay, corruption, and dissolution of nature, is an event rendered probable by so many analogies, that any phenomenon, which seems to have a tendency towards that catastrophe, comes within the reach of human testimony, if that testimony be very extensive and uniform.[26]

It is clear from this that sheer rarity and numerical infrequency of an event testified to is not the only factor relevant to an evaluation of the testimony. In this example of an extremely unusual event, doubt about <u>the connection between the testimony and</u>

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and certain knowledge of God (<u>An Essay concerning Human Understanding</u>, IV.X.1-19, pp. 310-21), and that there was 'one case where contrary experience lessens not the testimony'. - 'For where such supernatural events are suitable to ends aimed at by him who has the power to change the course of nature, there, under such circumstances, they may be the fitter to procure belief, by how much the more they are beyond or contrary to ordinary observation. This is the proper case of miracles' (IV.XVI.13 p. 342). Locke also considers the Bible to be Scripture or Holy Writ, and to have a superior status in comparison with other sources of testimony or evidence: 'Where the truth embraced is consonant to the revelation in the written word of God . . .' (IV.XIX.16, p. 363)

event testified to is overcome long before, and even independently of the doubt or uncertainty over the connection between this event and those other unknown states, things or events that are presumed to be its cause. Hume could readily believe in the occurrence of this event even if scientists never, as a matter of fact, provided an adequate explanation for it. In this sense, he has modified his earlier reference to the evidence for a fact 'diminishing, greater or less, in proportion as the fact is more or less unusual' (n. 21 above). The occurrence of this most unusual event is not doubted. Its causes are, however, as yet unknown, while it is presumed that they do exist.

Hume's capacity to accept the testimony for the eight days' darkness - 'our present philosophers, instead of doubting the fact, ought to receive it as certain, and ought to search for the causes'[27] - does somewhat counter the earlier estimation of the evaluation of evidence derived from witnesses and human testimony, where he said that its value

> varies with the experience, and is regarded as a proof or a probability, according as the conjunction between any particular kind of report and any kind of object has been found to be constant or variable.[28]

It may be, however, that, in the case of the darkness, the reference to 'so many analogies' suggests that after all, there are a number of events which enable the testimony for this prodigy to be considered as one of a kind of report which have commonly been found to be true.

But the more difficult problem lies in the fact that in the more extraordinary cases, we often do not have what amounts to independent access to both the testimony and the object or event testified to, apart from the testimony in question. We cannot say that we are accustomed to finding a conformity, a genuine connection between the testimony and the event - because we have not yet devised a way of gaining access to them in a way that even enables a working distinction to be maintained between them. Consider, for example, unidentified flying objects. There are hundreds of testimonials to strange objects in the skies - ranging from definitive descriptions of 'space-ships', fleets of flying saucers, mother ships, rapidly moving lights, vehicles changing course in an impossible manner, photographs of space-craft, to accounts of people being taken for examination inside the 'ships'. Hume's claim can well be put in the form of a question to this mass of data and testimony. Has the conjunction between this kind of report and

this kind of object been found to be constant or variable? Are we accustomed to find a conformity between testimony for flying saucers and existing flying saucers?

It becomes apparent where the problem lies. We do not have what amounts to independent, mult-attested, corroborated or decisive access to the objects testified to on so many occasions. Many sincere people have undoubtedly seen something - but there is every reason not to assent to the proposition that what they have seen is a space ship from other planets or galaxies. Though they might have seen such a thing, we have no testimony to date that carries general conviction. Ultimately, of course, our access to the objects themselves would be by yet further testimony - but testimony that met various criteria for 'conclusive proof' - that would be readily apparent were non-problematic contact with such creatures established. Some, no doubt, would still demand a 'personal interview', like 'doubting Thomas'. *

Flying saucers are thus somewhat worse-off than was ice for the Indian Prince. He might accept the fact on the second or third instance of independent testimony, along with the assurance that if he undertook the practical journey across the sea to the place where the witnesses came from, he too would find ice. At the present, we lack such a procedure for discovering flying saucers. In this respect, the flying saucers of to-day might turn out to behave rather like the mermaids of yesterday. While at one stage in the history of navigation, it might have been both desirable and reasonable to believe that testimony for these creatures referred to extant creatures, the exploration of the seas and the extent of trawler-fishing has given a practical answer to the question of their existence - as might the future exploration of space for other life forms.

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* Oil blessed by Martin of Tours is said to have increased. Stancliffe writes, 'Gregory of Tours . . . likewise had his doubts about the oil which was said to brim over from the oil lamps placed before the fragment of the true cross at Poitiers, until he saw it happening 'with my own eyes' (C. Stancliffe, St. Martin and His Hagiographer, p. 211, citing Gregory, In gloria martyrum 5 (Monumenta Germaniae Historia, Scriptores Rerum Merovingicarum 1, ii, p. 40)

Returning to the Miracles

The Dead Restored to Life

Hume begins by saying that the 'testimony considered apart and in itself, amounts to an entire proof'.[29] I take him to mean that we have nothing to go on but the bare testimony - and, we have already seen that he allows the testimony to derive from a number of witnesses, of good standing and of irrefragable character (Tacitus, Abbé de Paris).

One line of attack on the testimony follows a pathway of numerical or statistical insignificance, if not 'definitional nullity'. We have already referred to the distinctions that he makes between commonplace, extraordinary (less common) and miraculous events, to the counting of instances of conjunctions between events, and to the attempt to count the instances of true conjunction between testimony and event for different kinds of report. Continuing in this numerical vein, he introduces his reference to 'the laws of nature' - established by 'firm and unalterable experience'.[30] Here, the conjunction between events must in fact have been found to be constant and invariable.

> A miracle is a violation of the Laws of Nature: and as a firm and unalterable experience has established these laws, the proof against a miracle, from the very nature of the fact, is as entire as any argument from experience can possibly be imagined.[31]

If, however, law is merely a convenient shorthand for what has 'always' been found to be the case, nothing has been said that rules out the possibility of genuine anomaly. The 'anomalous' events might turn out to fall under some other law, because of factors not readily discernible to us - or, in the case of miracles, they might fall under no natural law whatsoever. Hume would be concerned to object only to the latter events, as his allowing of the eight days darkness indicates.

Hume seems to maintain apodictically that law and unalterable, uniform experience belong together in fact; in a way that automatically eliminates departures or variants that would be called miracles. The class of miracles is virtually null by definition rather than by empirical inquiry, and this is apparent in his first reference to the dead coming to life.

> It is no miracle that a man, seemingly in good health, should die on a sudden: because such a kind of death, though more unusual than any other, has yet been frequently observed to happen. But it is a miracle, that a dead man should come to life; [1] because that has never been observed

> in any age or country. [2] There must, therefore, be a uniform experience against every miraculous event, otherwise the event would not merit that appellation. [3] And as a uniform experience amounts to a proof, there is here a direct and full proof, from the nature of the fact, against the existence of any miracle.[32]

It would have been far better had Hume said 'It is a miracle . . . because such a thing is beyond the powers of what is truly a corpse'. It would be better because a number of bona fide examples, potentially miracles, in fact exist. 'But it is a miracle that a dead man should come to life, and the Gospels attribute three instances to Jesus, two more are attributed to the prayers of and bodily contact with Martin of Tours and at least two to St. Francis Xavier.'* Hume, who would certainly have known of some, if not all

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*There are three examples as part of an extensive list of miracles which Augustine seems to have gone to some pains to check, some of which are from his immediate experience: Concerning the City of God against the Pagans, a new translation by Henry Bettenson with an introduction by David Knowles, Penguin Books, 1972, p. 1042. Rex Gardner, 'Miracles of Healing in Anglo-Celtic Northumbria as recorded by the Venerable Bede and his contemporaries: a re-appraisal in the light of twentieth century experience', British Medical Journal 287 (24-31 Dec. 1983) p. 1932 refers to one example in Bede's Historia Ecclesiastica Gentis Anglorum 5:12 (in B. Colgrave and R. A. B. Mynors, Bede's Ecclesiastical History of the English People, Oxford: Oxford University Press 1969. He refers to another in Adomnan's Life of Columba (A. O. and M. O. Anderson, Adomnan's Life of Columba, 1:27, Edinburgh: Nelson, 1961) Gardner continues with an allegedly comparable (similar in many details) case from modern missionary work in Thailand, where the 'deceased' is the first woman to destroy her 'domestic spirit shelf' and convert. The missionaries are the first resident missionaries in the village, and there is an undoubtedly complex mix of forces and causes at work. She is 'dead' for twenty minutes, and when she recovers, she names the secrets of peoples' hearts and tells of having 'met' Christ and seen into heaven. Gardner concludes, (and I do not see Hume disagreeing with him) 'There is of course not the slightest proof that any of these people, Northumbrian, Pictish, or Thai, actually died. There are no electroencephalograms. But that does not affect the parallelism, nor its implications. . . . The adjective 'miraculous' is, however, permissible as a convenient shorthand for an otherwise almost inexplicable healing which occurs after prayer to God and brings honour to the Lord Jesus Christ.' Is there any point in continuing the argument with Hume if, after all, we entertain serious doubts about the reality of the deaths in question?

of these, must have been including an evaluation of all such instances in his claim - but at this point, he does not seem to have done justice to the claim that these examples were observed, and thus formed a class of candidates for historical miracles.

Neither does his second claim, [2], seem justified. An event does not have to have uniform experience against it before it can be called a miracle. There is no reason, in theory, why we should not have to consider upwards of a hundred cases of testimony for raising the dead, if we scoured all records for the said event. That undoubted majority of cases of permanent death need not be totally absolute for some few candidates to be genuine miracles. This is made clear in the traditional references to miracles, where St. Thomas attributes them to a factor not operating, or not operating in the same way, in all other cases, i.e. to the power of God. The examples calling for consideration themselves constitute the empirical claim that the tradition of our experience of death has not been totally uniform.

Neither need it be assumed that these instances of non-reversed death are 'against' the miraculous reversals [2]. Again, in Thomas' theology, both the natural event and the miracle were attributed, ultimately, to the same God, though the real differences between nature and miracle were not thereby dissolved. Properly uniform experience [3], would amount to an empirical proof. But, given examples of testimony in which we are interested, that is precisely the point in question, not what has been established.

Bearing in mind Hume's admission of the hypothetical, eight days' darkness, it seems that the key reason in his admission was the presumption that the event possessed a cause or causes. In the dead coming to life, Hume's presumption would therefore be, that here is an event for which there can be no cause - and even if there were such, it would under some conditions make the events as acceptable as the eight days' darkness. If a cause could be suggested, Hume might readily accept the event as an extraordinary occurrence, but no miracle. Where a theist might say that the absence of a possible, natural cause is a pre-condition for the event being a particular kind of miracle, Hume takes this factor as the clearest indication of impossibility. Let us, then, proceed to the example of the dead coming to life, that he constructs with testimony of the highest calibre in mind.

Hume's presentation of the facts is as follows:

I. All the historians who treat of England agree:
(i) Queen Elizabeth died on the first of January 1600.
(ii) Before her death she was seen by her physicians and the whole court - the custom.
(iii) After her death, she was seen by the same - also the custom.
(iv) Her successor was acknowledged and proclaimed by Parliament.
(v) After being interred a month, she again appeared.
(vi) She resumed the throne, and governed England for three years.

His response, or evaluation of these facts is as follows:

II. 'I should only assert it to have been pretended and that it neither was, nor possibly could be real.' *
(i) The difficulties involved in arranging a deceit of this kind are not insurmountable.
(ii) Neither are appeals to her known wisdom sufficient to preclude the thought that she could gain some advantage from the artifice.
(iii) The knavery and folly of men are such common phenomena, that I should rather believe the most extraordinary events to arise from their concurrence, than admit of so signal a violation of the laws of nature.

Hume really must insist on the appeal to conscious deceit in this case, almost to the point where this appeal to a lie becomes axiomatic. What if we even began with a modest presumption that the witnesses were <u>in fact</u> uniformly honest? And that the tomb on inspection proved to be of a kind that, once sealed, admitted of no air at all, and that had a mistaken burial occurred, the unfortunate would have only lived a few hours at most? Hume has, by his belief in the impossibility of miracles, his denial of all factors that make them possible, placed himself in a situation

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* The appeal to 'what could not possibly be real' is an important principle even to-day. 'Now, if we were able to assess these miracle stories at their face value, we would probably accept or reject them on the basis of two general criteria: we would reject them if we thought such occurrences were <u>a priori</u> impossible, thanks to our knowledge - or assumptions - about what has or has not occurred in comparable cases in the past, and what is ruled out by the findings of modern science. . . . ' Clare Stancliffe, <u>St. Martin and His Hagiographer</u>, p. 206.

where he must accuse otherwise honest, impartial persons of lying, in preference to accepting the reality of their testimony - that she was dead, that they buried her and that now she rules again.

When Hume introduces the possibility of an appeal to a Being with sufficient power to bring about this event, he does so only to deny its value immediately. For the moment, we can say that:

1. Given that the event could possibly be real, the accusation of lying or knavery would not be the only response to the witnesses.

2. Granted an adequate power for the event, the re-vivification would violate no law. It would leave all other instances of non-reversed death intact, and could be covered with an exception-clause. 'All men are mortal and once dead remain dead unless a power sufficient to reverse their condition exists and operates on a particular occasion.'

3. By 'nor possibly could be real', Hume can only mean;

a) There is no power that could act on this or any other specific occasion, or,

b) Even if this power acted, we could never be certain that it had acted. But this would not suit his argument, since the event would in fact be real though we did not know it, and the bona fide candidates, supported by testimony not-proven to be lying or mistaken, could not simply be ignored.

4. Given that a power sufficient for the event could be imagined or suggested, there would come a point at which we decided that the appeal to hoax became implausible. It would have to be just too elaborate, too well-planned, and depend upon the connivance of too many people, be open to discovery by someone not in on the plot, or who spoke against it on its first intimation, even by reason of desiring to elevate his own 'honesty' above that of a lying monarch.

5. Hume's scepticism is plausible because of the background material we cannot but help supply to complete our picture of that Queen. The miracle would be a singularly bizarre item in her life as it is otherwise known. As, however, Hume has constructed this example as an hypothesis in which apparently excellent testimony is given, there is no reason to confine the example to a single 'oddity', at the end of an unremarkable life. Why not fill in her life with numerous instances of her exercising 'miraculous' power to heal her sick subjects, each of which instances were also witnessed by some - and even make her life somehow miraculous from beginning to end?

6. It also needs to be pointed out where this re-vivification differs from a Resurrection. Even Gaskin and Burns seem to treat the events as the same.[34] Hume's restoration of the Queen is rather more like Lazarus on a grand scale (as if instead of raising the obscure Lazarus, Jesus had gone and re-united John the Baptist's body and head - so that he resumed his preaching for a further three years - until some other fate befell him). In the Resurrection, however, the end-state is dissimilar in many respects to the initial state.

Hume does turn to the conditions in which an appeal to the literal re-vivification of the Queen could be made. He objects in principle to allocating the miracle to a 'new system of religion'. He simply says that

> men, in all ages, have been so much imposed on by ridiculous stories of that kind, that this very circumstance would be full proof of a cheat . . . without further examination.[35]

In this, identifying an Almighty Being as the power sufficient for the miracle makes no difference to his evaluation of the testimony. Hume maintains that even so, we still have to perform a kind of 'probability-calculus' on past events and testimonies,

> to compare the instances of the violation of truth in the testimony of men, with those of the violation of the laws of nature by miracles, in order to judge which of them is most likely and probable.[36]

- and only in this process do we have any 'knowledge' of such a Being -

> it is impossible for us to know the attributes or actions of such a Being, otherwise than from the experience which we have of his productions, in the usual course of nature. This still reduces us to past observations.

At this point, all I can do, perhaps, is to say that I would want some further evidence of lying (or of innocent error) apart from the subject matter testified to. As well, the subject of independent certainty about the existence of a being with sufficient power to raise the dead would need to be explored (as in Newman's case) and remains, at least, a reasonable presumption. Given a modest belief, even a presumption that such a God existed, some descriptions of the re-vivification of Queen Elizabeth would be very hard to resist, and would stand on better specific, historical attestation than miracles of the Gospels.

In conclusion, we can present a rapid survey of the other miracles to which Hume refers. Traditional apologists knew that Jesus' miracles exceeded the force proper to a human utterance,

and discussed them in terms of instrumentality or incarnational instrumentality. This amounted to the assertion that God, the Almighty Being, was the active power in each case - though the limited human capacities were really involved and made effective. 'Instrumentality' would also be appealed to where non or pre-rational items are involved.

Though Hume dismisses the Vespasian and Abbé Paris cures, I do not think he denied that <u>something</u> happened on these occasions. Even for us, where we have a little more insight into the subjective and social causes of some illnesses, there is the possibility of acknowledging that many cures once automatically considered miraculous could now be given a psycho-social-human explanation - even in cases of sudden alleviation. In this sense, Gaskin is somewhat beside the point where he writes of Hume's

> precipitate readiness to play the Indian prince and dismiss events which could very well have happened (and not even be miracles) solely on the grounds that they do not conform to his rather imperfect grasp of what constitutes laws of nature . . . quite a lot else in the tone of the chapter conveys a sense of undue and slightly arrogant confidence about what is or is not physically possible.[37]

Hume could simply accept these events as strange or extraordinary once granted that they in fact possessed a cause or causes in the psyches, self-perceptions, social circumstances or acts of symbolizing self-construction or even faith of the persons cured. They are only impossible while they are thought to lack all possibility of causal explanation. Granted causes, even of a different kind and as yet undiscovered, they become like the eight days' darkness.

It could be maintained, not that the leg-restoring was ridiculous, but that the testimony could in fact be faulted. We could <u>imagine</u> a case where in a modern hospital, the doorkeeper had his leg amputated. If, then, (as has never been reported!) it were found to be re-grown, the testimony <u>would</u> be harder to fault - however unlikely it remains until such an event happens! But illnesses in general are a poor hunting ground for miracle searchers <u>seeking total proof</u>, owing to the fact that it is very hard to specify the differences between spontaneous remissions of 'incurable' diseases and miracles; and the possibility that there are natural, even mental factors involved of which we know

little in detail.* It seems to me to be undeniable that sick people got better in significant numbers in the Jansenist 'miracles' and that the vitriol surrounding them remains a minor tragedy in the history of the church.

No testimony would have convinced Hume, unlike Aquinas, of Dionysius' account of the moon-miracle at the crucifixion. He would have disbelieved it no matter who said they saw it. I suppose, though, that had it been universally attested, like the eight days' darkness, he would have admitted it and searched for some extraordinary gravitational cause. The presumption that there are appropriate causes for even the strangest human and natural events does seem to leave miracles like the feeding miracles of Jesus, the Cana wine miracle, the walking on the water and the raising of Lazarus, very much out on a limb. When taken on their own, as a tiny number of strange events for which no natural cause seems likely ever to be suggested (without changing the accounts in some significant way), they lack the degree of attestation that could carry the burden of proof to-day. Only by recovering the contextual certainties of an Aquinas or a Newman could their historicity be successfully defended - but to do that might itself be a somewhat miraculous, if not Quixotic task - and re-admit many more things besides.

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*Rex Gardner, 'Miracles of healing in Anglo-Celtic Northumbria as recorded by the Venerable Bede and his contemporaries: a re-appraisal in the light of twentieth century experience' pp. 1927-1933. Amongst the recent, clinical cases discussed is one of 'fibrosing alveolitis' in a child under the age of one, whose illness had progressed to the point where the mother was told that the prognosis was hopeless. Though not adherents to the church, the parents took the child to a Pentecostal healing service (26 Feb. 1978) and within five days, discernible improvement was registered, and 'when last seen at the age of 5 years 2 months (Nov. 1981) he was a perfectly normal boy with weight just below the 50th centile'. Gardner concludes, 'The prognosis for fibrosing alveolitis starting in the first year of life is almost uniformly fatal. It is that word "almost", underlined by Professor Webb in the last line of his case summary, which makes difficult any attempt ever to prove miraculous healing. . . . medicine knows few absolutes, and it would be impossible to refute the challenge that this was a case of unexplicable spontaneous remission.' (p. 1928)

CHAPTER VI

D. F. STRAUSS: THE REVALUATION OF LIMITLESS MIRACLES

Jesus: Miracle as Myth

Conception: a Miracle in its Mode God is born of a Woman

Otto Pfleiderer observed that Leben Jesu (1835) 'marked an epoch in the history of theology.'[1] Albert Schweitzer began a chapter on Leben Jesu by calling it 'one of the most perfect things in the whole range of learned literature.'[2] Recently, Hans-Herbert Stoldt has written,

> If there has ever been an explosive situation in the history of New Testament studies it was that caused by the appearance of Strauss' Life of Jesus, Critically Examined (1835). This impressed his contemporaries as a theological catastrophe which called everything into question. . . . A hitherto unprecedented reaction set in, to disprove Strauss' fundamental thesis: 'The Gospels contain not history, but myths! 3

It is therefore fitting to pursue Strauss' response to miracle in the Gospels. We refer to the same themes touched on when we traced the miraculous throughout Aquinas' 'Life of Jesus'. Hence, we begin with the aspect of miracle consisting of the Virgin conceiving and giving birth to God in the reality of the Divine-human union that exists from the moment of conception. Strauss writes,

> If reality is ascribed to the idea of the unity of the divine and human natures, is this equivalent to the admission that this unity must actually have been once manifested, as it never had been, and never more will be, in one individual? This is indeed not the mode in which Idea realizes itself; it is not wont to lavish all its fulness on one exemplar . . . it rather loves to distribute its riches among a multiplicity of exemplars which reciprocally complement each other . . . is not the idea of the unity of the divine and human natures a real one in a far higher sense, when I regard the whole race of mankind as its realization, than when I single out one man as such a realization? is not an incarnation of God from eternity a truer one than an incarnation limited to a particular point of time?
>
> This is the key to the whole of Christology, that, as

> subject of the predicate which the church assigns to Christ, we place, instead of an individual, an idea; but an idea which has an existence in reality, not in the mind only, like that of Kant. In an individual, a God-man, the properties and functions which the church ascribes to Christ contradict themselves; in the idea of the race, they perfectly agree.[4] (Italics mine)

A further justification for beginning with this somewhat Hegelian shift in the symbolism of Incarnation is found when we realize that ultimately, the critical questions that he puts to the Gospel miracles do not simply depend on the truth of this particular claim that he makes. It is, rather, one of a number of transformations that Incarnation can be subjected to. Schweitzer, to whom we have already referred, insisted on the importance of the dissolution of the traditional understanding of Incarnation for the quest of the historical Jesus, and we are struck by the similar reference to 'self-contradiction'.

> Greek theology was as indifferent in regard to the historical Jesus who lives concealed in the Gospels as was the early eschatological theology. More than that, it was dangerous to Him; for it created a new supernatural-historical Gospel, and we may consider it fortunate that the Synoptics were already so firmly established that the Fourth Gospel could not oust them. . . . When at Chalcedon the West overcame the East, its doctrine of the two natures dissolved the unity of the Person, and thereby cut off the last possibility of a return to the historical Jesus. The self-contradiction was elevated into a law. But the Manhood was so far admitted as to preserve, in appearance, the rights of history. Thus by a deception the formula kept the Life prisoner and prevented the leading spirits of the Reformation from grasping the idea of a return to the historical Jesus.
>
> This dogma had first to be shattered before men could once more go out in quest of the historical Jesus, before they could even grasp the thought of His existence. That the historic Jesus is something different from the Jesus Christ of the doctrine of the Two Natures seems to us now self-evident. We can, at the present day, scarcely imagine the long agony in which the historical view of the life of Jesus came to birth. And even when he was once more recalled to life, He was still, like Lazarus of old, bound hand and foot with grave-clothes - the grave-clothes of the dogma of the Dual Nature. . . . The historical investigation of the life of Jesus did not take its rise from a purely historical interest; it turned to the Jesus of history as an ally in the struggle against the tyranny of dogma.[5] (Italics mine)

The point is, that changes in response to miracle do not leave central, traditional theological understandings and descriptions of Jesus intact. As the miraculous dimension extends to the claim that in this union between God and Man, God is born of a woman, or has a human birth added to a perpetual 'birth' or generation within the Godhead, there is a sense in which the

shift in response to the miraculous begins here. Changes may begin here, but they lead to changes in wider theology as can be seen in the work of another Hegelian, Ludwig Feuerbach. Strauss, indeed, does not lag behind him in new perceptions of the human condition that emerge from revaluing the Incarnation. Strauss writes,

> Man being once mature enough to receive as his religion the truth that God is man, and man of a divine race; it necessarily follows, since religion is the form in which the truth presents itself to the popular mind, that this truth must appear, in a guise intelligible to all, as a fact obvious to the senses: in other words, there must appear a human individual who is recognised as the visible God. This God-man uniting in a single being the divine essence and the human personality, it may be said of him that he had the Divine Spirit for a father and a woman for his mother.[6]

Strauss is quite aware of the tradition of interpretation that he has departed from in dismissing the specific Incarnation. In one place he gives a concise account of that union between God and Man which he no longer finds acceptable.

> This doctrinal system of the ancient church concerning the person and work of Christ, passed also into the confessions of the Lutheran churches, and was still more elaborately developed by their theologians. With regard to the person of Christ, they adhered to the union of the divine and human natures in one person: according to them, in the act of this union, unitio personalis, which was simultaneous with the conception, it was the divine nature of the Son of God which adopted the human into the unity of its personality; the state of union . . . was . . . a real and supernatural union, and eternal in its duration. From this union with the divine nature, there result to the nature in Christ certain pre-eminent advantages. . . . This communion of natures, communio naturarum, is manifested by a communication of properties, communicatio idiomatum, in virtue of which the human nature participates in the advantages of the divine, and the divine in the redeeming work of the human. . . . His human nature in its union with the divine, participated from the moment of conception in divine properties: but as during his earthly life Jesus made no continuous use of them, that life to the time of his death and burial, is regarded as a state of humiliation: whereas, with the resurrection, or even with the descent into hell, commenced the state of exaltation which was consummated by the sessio ad dextram patris.[7]

This outline of the state in which Jesus was said to exist is significant for the wider discussion of Strauss on Jesus' miracles. It shows that he was aware of a theological response that could accommodate the miraculous. He is aware of a framework within which it makes sense to speak of Jesus as working miracles that otherwise exceed the capacities of man. As such, we must

conclude that it is partly due to dissatisfaction with this framing reality that reinterpretation of all the miracle-traditions surrounding Jesus take place. But, other factors do remain important, and it is a case of examining his overall interpretative response to the miraculous in the Gospels. Dissatisfaction with the basic dogmatic outline in which the miraculous had been set, combines with issues that emerge more specifically from differences between and inconsistencies within the Gospels, and with judgements about the human religious enterprise itself. Miracle will be revalued wherever it is encountered, and not less than where we encounter it in the condition said to have become an enduring reality from the moment of the miraculous conception.

Conception: A Miracle in its Matter
A Child Conceived Without a Father

Strauss maintains that Matthew and Luke do not make use of Trinitarian formulations, but refer the conception to the 'Spiritus Dei as found in the Old Testament: God in his agency upon the world, and especially upon man.'[8] This could be amenable to a later Trinitarian formulation, but the point is of importance for a response to the interpretation of the accounts themselves. Here, we are limited to a 'simple divine operation determining the conception of Jesus'[9] in which the event is confined to the miraculous formation of a human life, not the Incarnation of God the Son. Strauss gives little room for any pre-existent Christ or Son of God to become incarnate.[10] Strauss agrees with the tradition encountered in Aquinas, Newman and Lewis, that the accounts in Matthew and Luke 'express with sufficient clearness that the absence of human agency was supplied - not physically after the manner of heathen representations - but by the divine creative energy.'[11]

Strauss, unlike that former tradition, distinguishes between and separates the miraculous from the historical, and introduces the mythical as the proper domain for the former. This leaves an altogether non-miraculous history, which probably bore no resemblance to the miraculized narrative now found in the Gospels.

> If, says Gabler in his review of the Commentary of Paulus, we must relinquish the supernatural origin of Jesus, in order to escape the ridicule of our contemporaries, and if, on the other hand, the natural explanation leads to conclusions not only extravagant but revolting; the adoption of the mythus, by which all these difficulties are obviated, is to be preferred. In the world of mythology many great men had extraordinary births, and were sons of the gods. Jesus

himself spoke of his heavenly origin, and called God his father; besides, his title as Messiah was - Son of God. From Matthew i. 22, it is further evidence that the passage of Isaiah, vii. 14, was referred to Jesus by the early Christian Church. In conformity with this passage the belief prevailed that Jesus, as the Messiah, should be born of a virgin by means of divine agency; it was therefore taken for granted that what was to be actually did occur; and thus originated a philosophical (dogmatical) mythus concerning the birth of Jesus. But according to historical truth, Jesus was the offspring of an ordinary marriage, between Joseph and Mary; an explanation which, it has been justly remarked, maintains at once the dignity of Jesus and the respect due to his mother.[12]

What Strauss means by 'mythus' we shall turn to in the section matching Aquinas on accommodating the miraculous. The central claim made by Strauss concerns the attempt to retain the significance of the miraculous element at the same time as primarily historical reality is separated from it and given an altogether different character. It is to the reasons given for this distinction that we now turn.

Apart from the issues raised by the miraculous and its angelic accompaniments, Strauss argues that the accounts in Matthew and Luke make poor, inconsistent history when combined. We do not arrive at anything acceptable to straightforward historical sensibility. What was unquestionably consistent for Aquinas has become teased out into elements that cannot belong to one, comprehending history.

Strauss maintains that the conduct of the Matthean angel only makes sense if it is taken as the <u>first</u> appearance and intimation.[13]

1. The angel speaks as if his were the first announcement of the state in question.

2. He makes no allusion to the prior appearance to Mary.

3. There is no hint of reproach for Joseph failing to believe the Divine intimation given to Mary.

4. The conduct of the betrothed is incredible. If Mary had received a Divine visitation, she must have told Joseph. The Matthean story presumes that she had not.

5. Granted that she had told him, Joseph's disbelief is also inconceivable.

> This scepticism presupposes a mistrust of his betrothed which is incompatible with his character as a <u>just man</u> (Matt. i. 19), and an incredulity respecting the marvellous which is difficult to reconcile with a readiness on other occasions to believe in angelic

apparitions; nor, in any case, would this want of faith have escaped the censure of the angel who subsequently appeared to himself.[14]

6. It is impossible to amalgamate the detail of the two accounts into one consistent history, and equally, one cannot simply choose one narrative in preference to the other. 'We find ourselves, in reference to both accounts, driven back by necessity to the mythical view.'

This resolution of the matter by reference to the mythical is expressed as follows,

> The conception of Jesus through the power of the Holy Ghost ought not to be grounded upon a mere uncertain suspicion; it must have been clearly and positively asserted; and to this end a messenger from heaven was required, since theocratic decorum seemed to demand it far more in relation to the birth of the Messiah, than of a Samson or a John. Also the words which the angels use, correspond in part with the Old Testament annunciations of extraordinary children. The appearing of the angel in the one narrative beforehand to Mary, but in the other at a later period to Joseph, is to be regarded as a variation in the legend or in the composition, which finds an explanatory counterpart in the history of the annunciation of Isaac. . . . As in relation to the birth of Isaac, different legends or poems were formed without reference to one another, some simpler, some more embellished: so we have two discordant narratives concerning the birth of Jesus.[15]

In this respect, it is as if the miraculous has no fixed limits with respect to Jesus' origins, but generates a tradition of increasing intensity. Strauss responds to the fact that the conception of Jesus is not maintained uniformly across the New Testament, but exhibits a gradation from natural, human beginnings to wonders that began not merely with Jesus' conception but in the origins and lives of his parents.

> There is a striking gradation in the different representations of the conception and birth of Jesus given in the canonical and in the apocryphal Gospels. They exhibit the various steps, from a simple statement of a natural occurrence, to a minute and miraculously embellished history, in which the event is traced back to its earliest date.[16]

Mark and John presuppose an ordinary birth with Joseph as father and Mary as mother. Matthew introduces the miraculous, at a relatively modest level. Here, the pregnancy is discovered and then followed by a revelatory dream in which the Divine origin and purpose of the conception is explained. The clear impression is that Joseph engages in sexual relationships after the birth of their first-born. In Luke's account, the pregnancy is announced

and prefaced by a celestial apparition to the woman who is herself to be the mother. The apocryphal Gospels, the Protoevangelium Jacobi and the Evangelium de Nativitate Mariae preface the birth of Mary herself with a similar divine annunciation.

Strauss' claim is that we must attend to the miraculous element in a uniform manner, not apportioning the two miraculous conceptions of the Gospels to the historical and the rest to the unhistorical, or, in the case of Mark and John, to the incomplete. What we have is a discernible process in which natural origins become supplanted by the miraculous which then follows its own internal logic to the point where it dominates the story from every possible aspect. To this he responds;

> If we in our day, with a perception of the fabulous character of such narratives, look down alike upon the Fathers of the church and upon these naturalistic interpreters, we are certainly so far in the right, as it is only by gross ignorance that this character of the apocryphal accounts is here to be mistaken; more closely considered, however, the difference between the apocryphal and the canonical narratives concerning the early history of the Baptist and of Jesus, is seen to be merely a difference of form: they have sprung, as we shall hereafter find, from the same root . . . Still, the Fathers of the Church and these naturalistic interpreters had this superiority over most of the theologians of our own time; that they did not allow themselves to be deceived respecting the inherent similarity by the difference of form, but interpreted the kindred narratives by the same method; treating both as miraculous or both as natural; and not, as now is usual, the one as fiction and the other as history.[17]

We could recall, however, that Aquinas was quite capable of dismissing miracles ascribed to Jesus in his infancy because they were inappropriate at that stage of the Incarnation, and because John referred to the first of the signs done by Jesus. One even wonders if the very distinction between apocrypha and Gospel already presumes discrimination between the genuine and the bogus. Strauss, however, insists on the discernible process of elaboration in the status of the conception and in the surrounding circumstances of the parents. This process does seem to indicate that the miraculous exhibits a power of its own that cannot merely be confined to one indubitable moment. Once miracle is in, it tends to take-over.

> A curious ladder may be formed of these different beliefs and superstitions in relation to the connection between Mary and Joseph.
>
> 1. Contemporaries of Jesus and composers of the genealogies: Joseph and Mary man and wife - Jesus the offspring of their marriage.
>
> 2. The age and authors of our histories of the birth of Jesus: Mary and Joseph betrothed only; Joseph having no participation in the conception of the child, and previous

to his birth no conjugal connexion with Mary.

3. Olshausen and others: subsequent to the birth of Jesus, Joseph, though the husband of Mary, relinquishes his matrimonial rights.

4. Epiphanius, Protoevangelium Jacobi and others: Joseph a decrepit old man, no longer to be thought of as a husband: the children attributed to him are of a former marriage. More especially it is not as a bride and wife that he receives Mary; he takes her merely under his guardianship.

5. Protoevang., Chrysostom and others: Mary's virginity was not only not destroyed by any subsequent births of children by Joseph, it was not in the slightest degree impaired by the birth of Jesus.

6. Jerome: not Mary only but Joseph also observed an absolute virginity, and the pretended brothers of Jesus were not his sons but merely cousins to Jesus.[18]

For Strauss, this 'ladder' begins in non-miraculous reality. Jesus' conception was natural and the first of many. The motivation to depict his origins as miraculous lay elsewhere than in reminiscence, or simple announcement of miraculous fact. Strauss' own conclusion is that

> We have consequently no ground for denying that the mother of Jesus bore her husband several other children desides Jesus, younger, and perhaps also older; the latter, because the representation in the New Testament that Jesus was the first-born may belong no less to the mythus than the representation of the Fathers that he was an only son.[19]

At the heart of Strauss' re-interpretation of the miraculous element in the conception lie two groups of argument. He speaks of 'physico-theological' and 'historical-exegetical' difficulties facing belief in the miracle.

To the former group belong considerations concerning natural law and universal causality, and the provision of adequate motive for God to act in this way. The 'physico' objections amount to Humean objections based on 'exceptionless experience'.

> Such a conception would be a most remarkable deviation from all natural laws. . . . it is proved by exceptionless experience that only by the concurrence of the two sexes is a new human being generated.[20]

We have seen that this claim, by itself, is quite unconvincing to adherents of the former tradition of inquiry into miracle. Strauss' theological objection consists of the claim that 'the divine omnipotence . . . is never exerted in the absence of an adequate motive.'[21] No adequate motive exists here. As it turns out, Mary is said to require an act of God to acquire the sinless condition in which the holy child can be conceived without the taint of sin. The simple removal of Joseph is insufficient. His claim then

amounts to the observation that it would be as easy to render the natural contribution of Joseph free from the taint of sin as to remove his contribution altogether, creating the need for an even greater miracle to be worked on Mary. It is

> easier to do the same with respect to that of the father, than by his total exclusion, to violate the natural law in so unprecedented a manner.[22]

Strauss seems to concede that a defence of sorts might be mounted by those who envelope themselves 'in a supernaturalism inaccessible to arguments based on reason', and so he adds the principal historical-exegetical objection.

This consists of the significant claim that the miraculous origins of Jesus are only referred to at the beginnings of Matthew and Luke, and have no further role in the rest of the New Testament. They show every sign of being a later development added to an earlier tradition that knew nothing of it.

Strauss also objects to claims that similarities with 'mythical sons of the gods' point to a 'general anticipation and desire of such a fact, and therefore guarantees its reality, at least in one historical manifestation.'[23] His own belief is that

> The truth does not consist in any one individual fact, presenting an accurate correspondence with that notion, but an idea which realizes itself in a series of facts, which often bear no resemblance to the general notion. The widely spread notion of a golden age does not prove the existence of a golden age: so the notion of divine conceptions does not prove that some one individual was thus produced.[24]

This claim is unobjectionably correct in some aspects. It does not, however, prevent the possibility of one (or more) such conceptions being a literal event. That would then have to be established on grounds specific to that occasion. Given the existence of a collection of tales or legends or myths of divine conceptions, one might well have no reason to consider them as anything other than this. Given one conception that has long been maintained as being both miraculous and historical, the inquirer is obliged to at least consider the connection between this conception and the others that have been described without recourse to historicity, and to consider the circumstances that have, as a matter of tradition, maintained the significant differences pertaining to this case.

The final Straussian consideration on the miraculous conception concerns the reality of the angel who bore the message of annunciation to Mary. In the study of Aquinas, we were struck by the perceptual reality of the appearing angel. Strauss' conclusions at this point are antithetical to Aquinas' and add to

the momentum of re-interpretation.

> The first offence against our modern notions in this narrative is the appearance of the angel . . . it is inconceivable that the constitution of the celestial hierarchy should actually correspond with the notions entertained by the Jews subsequent to the exile and that the names given to the angels should be in the language of the people. . . . Bauer insists that wherever angels appear, both in the New Testament and in the Old, the narrative is mythical. Even admitting the existence of angels, we cannot suppose them capable of manifesting themselves to human beings, since they belong to the invisible world, and spiritual existences are not cognizable by the organs of sense. [25]

Relocating the Miraculous
Cause and Myth

Causality is an enduring theme in the discussion of miracle. It appeared in both Aquinas' and Newman's discussion of miracle. Both had a sense of determinate nature - of things and their fixed properties, of lawlike regularities in nature, and even the necessity, all things being equal, of a particular outcome, given specific initial conditions and the interacting factors. Over and above this, they were able to accommodate literal miracles, and we saw how their concepts of cause and of God were so adjusted that neither the reality of natural or miraculous events was impeded. Both kinds of event were possible, and the reality of the distinction between nature and miracle was never in doubt. There again, both nature and miracle were traceable to God Himself as the creative cause of all.

We are therefore struck by the different response to miracle and cause that we encounter in Leben Jesu. Strauss begins the text with a reference to the discovery of causal reality that eradicates the historical miracle.

> A main element in all religious records is sacred history; a history of events in which the divine enters, without intermediation, into the human . . . But as the progress of mental cultivation mainly consists in the gradual recognition of a chain of causes and effects connecting natural phenomena with each other; so the mind in its development becomes ever increasingly conscious of those mediate links which are indispensable to the realization of the ideal; and hence the discrepancy between the modern culture and the ancient records, with regard to their historical portion, becomes so apparent, that the immediate intervention of the divine in human affairs loses its probability.[26]

This conception of the universal domain, reality and power of causality leaves no room for the miraculous, and enforces a

comprehension of history from which it is excluded.

> But the fact is, the pure historic idea was never developed among the Hebrews during the whole of their political existence; their latest historical works, such as the Books of the Maccabees, and even the writings of Josephus, are not free from marvellous and extravagant tales. Indeed no just notion of the true nature of history is possible, without a perception of the inviolability of the chain of finite causes, and of the impossibility of miracles. This perception which is wanting to so many minds of our own day was still more deficient in Palestine, and indeed throughout the Roman empire. And to a mind still open to the reception of the marvellous, if it once be carried away by the tide of religious enthusiasm, all things will appear credible, and should this enthusiasm lay hold of a yet wider circle, it will awaken a new creative vigour . . . To account for such an enthusiasm it is by no means necessary to presuppose the gospel miracles as the existing cause. This may be found in the known religious dearth of that period, a dearth so great that the cravings of the mind after some religious belief excited a relish for the most extravagant forms of worship; secondly in the deep religious satisfaction which was afforded by the belief in the resurrection of the deceased Messiah, and by the essential principles of the doctrine of Jesus.[27] (Italics mine)

One cannot overstress the sense in which Strauss' mind is dominated by this conception of the fixedness and inviolability of causal reality. It is an axiom of all inquiry into God and the scope of His operations, into the study of nature, and the historical dimension of religious inquiry. Where Aquinas was certain that God was free to act in whatsoever way He willed, in accordance with His Wisdom, and Newman that God had worked many miracles for which we had sufficient historical evidence, Strauss revalues these conclusions and begins from an altogether different certainty.

> Our modern world, on the contrary, after many centuries of tedious research, has attained a conviction, that all things are linked together by a chain of causes and effects, which suffer no interruption. . . . the totality of finite things forms a vast circle, which, except that it owes its existence and laws to a superior power, suffers no intrusion from without. This conviction is so much a habit of thought with the modern world, that in actual life, the belief in a supernatural manifestation, an immediate divine agency, is at once attributed to ignorance or imposture. . . . From this point of view, at which nature and history appear as a compact tissue of finite causes and effects, it was impossible to regard the narratives of the Bible, in which this tissue is broken by innumerable instances of divine interference, as historical.[28]

This concept of causality and its universal domain contributes to Strauss' appeal to the mythical when responding to the miraculous. His argument is complex, and abstract in the extreme at this point. As we have seen in the earlier reference to the Incarnation, and

in Schweitzer on the Two Natures in Christ, it involves an appeal to a charge of self-contradiction. Here, Strauss maintains that the various factors required to have both natural causality and miracles, and Divine-mediate and Divine-immediate causality, cannot be met. The system collapses in self contradiction. In what follows, we can see the appearance, in a different form, of Aquinas' dual-aspect causality in which all things and events could ultimately be traced-up to God, the fount of all reality and literally responsible for the causal capacities of things. Strauss wrote,

> The proposition that God works sometimes mediately, sometimes immediately, upon the world, introduces a changeableness, and therefore a temporal element, into the nature of his action, which brings it under the same condemnation as both other systems . . . if we proceed from the idea of God, from which arose the demand for his immediate operation, then the world is to be regarded in relation to him as a Whole: on the contrary, if we proceed from the idea of the finite, the world is a congeries of separate parts, and hence has arisen the demand for a merely mediate agency of God: - so that we must say - God acts upon the world as a Whole immediately, but on each part only by means of his action on every other part, that is to say, by the laws of nature.
>
> This view brings us to the same conclusion with regard to the historical value of the Bible . . . The miracles which God wrought for Moses and Jesus, do not proceed from his immediate operation on the Whole, but presuppose an immediate action in particular cases, which is a contradiction to the type of the divine agency we have just given. The supranaturalists indeed claim an exception from this type on behalf of the biblical history; a presupposition which is inadmissable from our point of view, according to which the same laws, although varied by various circumstances, are supreme in every sphere of being and action, and therefore every narrative which offends against these laws, is to be recognized as so far unhistorical.[29]

These principles, when employed in the interpretation of the Gospel miracles must lead to a reappraisal of their significance. It is also significant to note that Newman, Strauss' contemporary, was alive to the problem generated by limiting the appeal to the historicity of miracle to the Scripture. It was not only in the Biblical history that he looked for the literally miraculous, but saw the possibility of God working miracles wherever and whenever appropriate. For the moment, I want to pass over attempting to discuss whether Strauss has sufficiently established that miraculous activity is countered because it introduces and depends on contradictory notions of God's actions. I merely note that it seems to me to be extremely difficult and complex to arrive at what would amount to an impartial assessment of the claim, it seeming

to be taken as more axiomatic than demonstrable. More importantly, it is at this point that Strauss introduces the category of Myth to accommodate the miraculous in the Jewish and Christian religions. 'The result, then, however surprising, of a general examination of the biblical history, is that the Hebrew and Christian religions, like all others, have their mythi.'[30]

Jesus often appears within mythi, not history, in the Gospels. They accommodate the miraculous and supernatural dimension from which primary history is somewhat different. Hence,

> We distinguish by the name evangelical mythus a narrative relating directly or indirectly to Jesus, which may be considered not as the expression of a fact, but as the product of an idea of his earliest followers: such a narrative being mythical in proportion as it meets this character. . . . The pure mythus in the Gospel will be found to have two sources, which in most cases contributed simultaneously, though in different proportions, to form the mythus. The one source is, as already stated, the Messianic ideas and expectations existing according to their several forms in the Jewish mind before Jesus, and independently of him; the other is that particular impression which was left by the personal character, actions, and fate of Jesus, and which served to modify the Messianic idea in the minds of the people.[31]

Thus, the miraculous element was not simply created ex nihilo, or even by any individual between say A.D. 30 and 70. Rather existing themes from the Messianic legend were transferred and adapted to this individual.

> There remains to be effected only the transference of Messianic legends, almost already formed, to Jesus, with some alterations to adapt them to christian opinions, and to the individual character and circumstances of Jesus: only a very small proportion of mythi having to be formed entirely new.[32]

Room is also made for what Strauss calls historical mythi. These are miraculous incidents that have in fact emerged from particular incidents in his life, that were originally devoid of miracle, but were made into a vehicle for it. For example, he refers to sayings concerning 'fishers of men', or a barren fig tree, and even a non-supernatural baptism; all of which become enhanced and recast in a somewhat miraculous mode. Strauss is quite adamant and specific about myth. Containing the miraculous, it is not historical - 'it is not history', but 'it is fiction, the product of the particular mental tendency of a certain community.'[33] These claims lead us straight back to the point of departure in notions of law, causality, and to a Deity bound to 'mediate' action. We can tell that an account is non-historical and mythical, firstly

> When the narration is irreconcilable with the known and universal laws which govern the course of events. Now according to these laws, agreeing with all just philosophical conceptions and all credible experience, the absolute cause never disturbs the chain of secondary causes by single arbitrary acts of interposition, but rather manifests itself in the production of the aggregate of finite causalities, and of their reciprocal action. When therefore we meet with an account of certain phenomena or events of which it is either expressly stated or implied that they were produced immediately by God himself (divine apparitions - voices from heaven and the like), or by human beings possessed of supernatural powers (miracles, prophecies), such an account is <u>in so far</u> to be considered as not historical. And inasmuch as, in general, the intermingling of the spiritual world with the human is found only in unauthentic records, and is irreconcilable with all just conceptions; so narrative of angels and of devils, of their appearing in human shape and interfering with human concerns, cannot possibly be received as historical.[34]

Thus, we see that an altogether different history than the one maintained by Aquinas and Newman will emerge. The very features that they regarded as literally miraculous, and in a sense, continuous with their own historical existence, will be relocated, and an altogether different history will emerge. It is probably more accurate to say that the respective theologians respond to an altogether different history that they believe to be the literal, historical reality. In each case, miracle, and its surrounding realities, are seen in altogether different lights.

<u>The Magi's Star</u>

Strauss gives a fair and comprehensive account of the alternative responses to the story of the moving star that led the Magi to Jesus. He refers to the traditions of the Fathers in which 'The star of the Magi could not then be an ordinary, natural star, but must have been one created by God for that particular exigency, and impressed by him with a particular law of motion and rest.'[35] He refers to attempts by modern 'orthodox' to reduce the element of literal, extraordinary motion conveyed by the story as 'transplantation of rationalistic artifice into the soil of orthodox exegesis.'[36]

Strauss retains the extraordinary motion by shifting the locus of the story from the astronomically bizarre, the historically unheard of, to what is proper in the realm of myth. The star was not, <u>in fact</u>, a star in the natural sky, but in the mythical heavens.

I would stress, however, that the power of the story lies in the extent to which, at its origin, no sharp distinction was made between the mythical and the natural heaven, so that the star is really intended to be moving in the sky of this world, and it is

in this realm that God's power is being displayed.

Significantly, it is not only the miraculous movement of the star that presents difficulties for any historically-minded interpreter. Strauss objects equally to the failure of the star to enable the Magi to avoid Herod altogether, thus leading to the massacre of the innocents. He also objects, as far as a simple history goes, to the number and superfluity of visions needed to guide and redirect Joseph.

> For the star and the first vision, we have already remarked, one miracle might have been substituted, not only without detriment but with advantage; either the star or the vision might from the beginning have deterred the magi from going to Jerusalem, and by this means perhaps have averted the massacre ordained by Herod. But that the two last visions are not united in one is a mere superfluity; for the direction to Joseph to proceed to Nazareth instead of Bethlehem, which is made the object of a special vision, might just as well have been included in the first. Such a disregard, even to prodigality, of the lex parsimoniae in relation to the miraculous, one is tempted to refer to human imagination rather than divine providence.[37]

Other points objected to include the apparent endorsement of aspects of astrology, and Herod's naive behaviour in not following the Magi.

Where then did the star come from? Strauss believes that it emerged from an interpretation of Numbers 24.17, from a milieu in which astrology was a reality, and from an application of Messianic belief to form a story of Jesus' origins. He refers to 'the Jewish expectation that a star would become visible at the appearance of the Messiah', and adds

> The prophecy of Balaam (Num. xxiv. 17), 'A star shall come out of Jacob', was the cause - not indeed, as the Fathers supposed, that magi actually recognized a newly-kindled star as that of the Messiah, and have journeyed to Jerusalem - but that legend represented a star to have appeared at the birth of Jesus, and to have been recognized by astrologers as the star of the Messiah. . . . In the time of Jesus it was the general belief that stars were always the forerunners of great events; hence the Jews of that period thought that the birth of the Messiah would necessarily be announced by a star, and this supposition had a specific sanction in Num. xxiv. 17. The early converted Jewish Christians could confirm their faith only by labouring to prove that in him were realized all the attributes lent to the Messiah by Jewish notions of their age.[38]

Strauss' claim is that the conviction that Jesus was the Messiah led to the application of all the features thought to pertain to Messiah, and the creative utilization of available sources and motifs - often involving the formation of the miraculous.

What was more natural, when on the one hand was presented

> Balaam's messianic star out of Jacob (for the observation of which magian astrologers were the best adapted); on the other, a light which was to arise on Jerusalem, and to which distant nations would come, bringing gifts - than to combine the two images and to say: In consequence of the star which had risen over Jerusalem, astrologers came from a distant land with presents for the Messiah whom the star announced? But when the imagination once had possession of the star, and of travellers attracted by it from a distance, there was an inducement to make the star the immediate guide of their course.[39]

Now this stands as a reasonable hypothesis not only about the miraculous detail in the story, but the many further features. It is to be compared with Aquinas' suggestion about the literal creation of a new star that left the fixed stars in their place, and with the suggestion of Mascall that retained it as a rare, natural event but removed all miracle except that of timing. Strauss' response to the story is important because it is a consistent attempt to respond to the miraculous dimension in it, that would enable us to see the significance it had for its first hearers, to respond to that significance ourselves, but not to force a story full of the non-historical into the historical mode of reality. So to force the story leads either to some extremely bizarre astronomy, or to a restless search for the natural, providential circumstances that were written up as miraculous guidance. It is not in this sense crucial that Strauss be shown to be correct in <u>every</u> point of interpretation (for example, on the extent to which astrological features are involved); but in the cumulative consistency and capacity to respond to the detail of the story, and bearing in mind the alternative approaches, his interpretation is convincing.

Jesus' Miracles

The Darkness at the Cross

In the study of Aquinas, the five-fold moon miracle constituted a high point of belief in the miraculous, and in the power possessed by Christ. Strauss refers to the prodigies attendant on the death of Jesus, and observes their unequal distribution among the Evangelists: 'the first alone has them all; the second and third merely the darkness and the rending of the veil: while the fourth knows nothing of these marvels.'[40]

Strauss notes of the darkness (as Aquinas had noted), that it was not the time for a natural eclipse. He rejects the suggestion that the darkness was due to natural, atmospheric conditions - of 'obscuring vapours in the air, such as are wont to precede earthquakes' - partly because the narrator seems to include

the entire globe in his reference, which stands as an obvious exaggeration.

Combining references to traditions of solar, astral and lunar phenomenon at the demise of the great, he concludes,

> But these parallels, instead of being supports to the credibility of the evangelical narrative, are so many premises to the conclusion, that we have here also nothing more than the mythical offspring of universally prevalent ideas, - a Christian legend, which would make all nature put on the weeds of mourning to solemnize the tragic death of the Messiah.[41]

Had he digested Aquinas on the moon miracle, Strauss might have shifted his emphasis from 'solemnizing the tragedy' to portent of the power of the one hanging there, since the Christ himself was held responsible for the obedient motion of the moon that brought about the miraculous darkness.

Demons, Demoniacs And Exorcisms

Strauss denies that demons exist, seeing this as part of a primitive outlook now correctly dispensed with. However, he will not allow theologians to otherwise tamper with these stories, saying, for instance that Jesus could not have shared in this primitive belief. Apart from the non-existence of demons, specific fidelity to the story is demanded. Strauss has his own understanding of the best description for these complaints, but will not, rightly, permit Jesus to share in hypotheses totally beyond the outlook of his day. So Strauss can speak of 'a disturbance of the self-consciousness causing the possessed person to speak in the person of the demon' - of spasmodic states reaching to epilepsy, and of grosser disturbances extending to even a plurality of demonic voices. The insane, the epileptic, the dumb and the blind and even those contracted with gout - 'are by the evangelists designated more or less precisely as demoniacs'.[42] Jesus shares the belief that wicked, unclean spirits take possession of people, speaking through their organs and 'putting their limbs in motion at pleasure'.

As well as citing extensively from contemporary sources containing references to the demonic, to illustrate the popular character of the narratives contained in the gospels, Strauss has further objections to later orthodoxy's acceptance of literal possession and exorcism.

> 'It remains absolutely inconceivable how the union between the two could be so far dissolved, that a foreign self-consciousness could gain an entrance, thrust out that which belonged to the organism, and usurp its place.'[43]

Even so, this is the outlook possessed by Jesus and any theologian who tries to tone down this feature, will at once depart from what is said.

> But the most vulnerable point of Olshausen's opinion concerning demons is this: it is too much for him to believe that Jesus asked the name of the demon in the Gadarene; since he himself doubts the personality of those emanations of the kingdom of darkness, it cannot, he thinks have been thus decidedly supposed by Christ - hence he understands the question, 'What is thy name?' (Mark v. 9) to be addressed, not to the demon, but to the man, plainly in opposition to the whole context.[44]

Strauss, then, correctly dismisses attempts to interpret the gospel narratives as if they were <u>really</u> about various disorders - they were really about what the participants and the narrator believed them to be about even though we decline to believe in the existence of such creatures.

> Let us then relinquish the ungrateful attempt to modernize the New Testament conception of the demoniacs, or to Judaize our modern ideas; let us rather in relation to this subject, understand the statements of the New Testament simply as they are given, without allowing our investigations to be restricted by the ideas therein presented, which belonged to the age and nation of its writers.[45]

There can be, however, a coinciding of story and primary reality in the sense that the text could be referring to actual occasions on which people whom we would describe as sick were cured by being addressed by Jesus. Psychical disorders, understood as possessions, can be cured by a command.

In discussing the exorcism of the demoniac in the Capernaum Synagogue, he is more concerned with the additional factor - that the demon knew him to be Messiah by 'an intuition of his demonical nature'[46] knowledge which Jesus wishes to keep from the others. One cannot derive, naturalistically, this information from any other source than from the world of the demons themselves. To this extent, the gospel departs from historical reality and enters the realm of 'popular ideas'.[47]

<u>The Gadarene Demoniac</u>

This story is a touchstone for any attempt to retain the literal historicity of Jesus' exorcisms, not only as real expulsions of demonic creatures, but for any naturalistic accounts which merely reject this dimension of the story while retaining the rest as historical. That is, that there were 2,000 pigs but no demons!

Once more, the demonic recognition of Messiah is 'a product of the Jewish christian opinion respecting the relation of the demons

to the Messiah'.[48] Furthermore, where it was inconceivable that one demon should literally possess one man, it is even more improbable that 'several demons had set up their habitation in one individual'.[49]

> For as possession means nothing else, than that the demon constitutes himself the subject of consciousness, and as consciousness can in reality have but one focus . . . it is under every condition absolutely inconceivable that several demons should at the same time take possession of one man.[50]

Even granting the view of that time, it remains a difficulty that the demons as intelligent spirits would enter mere swine, brutal forms. Indeed, the prayer offered by the demons to avoid banishment or worse 'cannot possibly have been offered by real demons, though it might by Jewish maniacs, sharing the ideas of their people'.[51]

It is inconceivable that 2,000 swine will thus destroy themselves; neither is it justifiable as a lesson to man; it presumes that Jesus could not have merely banished them immediately and left the swine alone. Nor is it conceivable as a punishment due to unclean animals, nor to their owners as being in breach of Jewish Law; on which point Pythagoras is more just in paying the fishermen for liberated fish. The Evangelists 'have here a particular which cannot possibly have happened in the manner they allege'.[52]

Strauss provides an alternative explanation of the presence of these features by referring to extant motifs serving a similar function in other stories. Hence, he refers to the accounts in Josephus of the exorcist acting according to Solomon's precepts, in which, to convince the participants of the reality of the expulsion (demonstration), a nearby vessel of water is overturned. An ocular proof of the expulsion is provided. In the same way, a departing demon overturns a statue in the Vita Apollonii.[53] The fate of the swine has the same function in Jesus' case, only to a greater degree, on account of the size of the herd involved, and its distance from the scene.

> If then the agitation of some near object, without visible contact, was held the surest proof of the reality of an expulsion of demons, this proof could not be wanting to Jesus.[54]

The contrariety of the animals acting against nature and destroying themselves is of a kind with the statue falling over contrary to the laws of gravity or motion, by which it ought to have remained stable.

> Only by this derivation of our narrative from the confluence of various ideas and interests of the age, can we explain the above noticed contradiction, that the demons first petition for the bodies of the swine as a habitation, and immediately after, of their own accord destroy this habitation. The

> petition grew out of the idea that demons shunned incorporeality, the destruction out of the ordinary test of the reality of an exorcism.[55]

In Strauss' account of the story, we retain the capacity to respond to an original 'world-of-meaning' in which the story makes consistent sense, and we are not led to reduce the story to the level of some allegedly recoverable natural event that avoids the demonic dimension. Yet, neither does he commit us to beliefs about demons, their mode of habitation, their possession of individuals, desire for corporeal residence, and ultimately, about their fate when immersed in water.

It is while discussing the exorcisms that Strauss introduces an important principle that he often returns to in the discussion of miracles. The principle concerns the extent to which a condition is in fact susceptible to a human intention or word of address. He uses this to distinguish between what is possible and what is impossible, and he maintains that Jesus' healing powers are directly related to the extent to which mental disease has affected physical states. Real physical disorder is placed beyond the power of a healing touch or word.

> There is, however, a marked gradation among these states, according as the psychical derangement has more or less fixed itself corporeally, and the disturbance of the nervous system has become more or less habitual, and shared by the rest of the organization. We may therefore lay down the following rule: the more strictly the malady was confined to mental derangement, on which the word of Jesus might have an immediate moral influence, or in a comparatively slight disturbance of the nervous system, on which he would be able to act powerfully through the medium of the mind, the more possible was it for Jesus <u>by his word</u> λόγῳ (Matthew viii. 16) and <u>instantly</u> παραχρῆμα (Luke xiii. 13), to put an end to such states: on the other hand, the more the malady had already confirmed itself, as a bodily disease, the more difficult is it to believe that Jesus was able to relieve it in a purely psychological manner and at the first moment.[56]

Strauss then applies this principle to all the accounts of the demon-possessed, accepting as possibly historical only those cures which meet this capacity to be effected by command. Strauss will re-apply this criterion to the other miracles and use it to remove them from the domain of the historical - no human word can cognitively penetrate to the auditory organs and consciousness of the dead - because these very faculties are absent. But for the moment, amongst the demoniacs,

> That even dumbness and a contraction of many years' duration . . . that these afflictions should disappear at

> a word, no one who is not committed to dogmatical opinions can persuade himself. . . . least of all is to be conceived, that even without the imposing influence of his presence, the miracle-worker could effect a cure at a distance, as Jesus is said to have done on the daughter of the Canaanitish woman.[57]

This principle does not in fact prove that the miraculous is not possible. Rather, it provides a clear indication of the point at which an interpreter who utilized belief in miracle would have to invoke the appropriate power of God. Strauss is in this sense absolutely right that a human voice cannot subject the weather to it, or command the dead to return to life, unless as Aquinas and the others have indicated, the human concerned exists in a mode in which access to the power of God is possible. On the lesser point, the realities of psychosomatic and socially induced and conditioned illness suggest that human words and acts from specific people can in fact affect complaints that have become well and truly, physical debilities in the sufferer.

The Loaves and Fishes

Strauss concludes that the stories of miraculous feeding are derived from Old Testament stories of the Mosaic provision in the wilderness, of Elijah and the widow of Zarephath, Elisha and the one hundred men, and a rabbinical story of a small quantity of shew-bread sufficing for the supply of all the priests in the time of an exceptionally holy man.[58] The feeding stories are an exhibition of similar themes, applied to Jesus.

Strauss observes that this is not so much a miracle wrought on natural things, but on 'productions of nature which have been wrought upon by art'.[59] The objects in question are not cereal grain and living fish, but 'prepared articles of food'. Accordingly, there follows a useful and accurate account of the modes of production that one might believe applicable to natural and 'artistic' - i.e., technical production of food, as distinct from the miraculous. He intends to undermine attempts to describe the miracle as 'an acceleration of natural processes'.

> Nothing, it is true, is more familiar to our observation than the growth and multiplication of natural objects as presented to us in the parable of the sower, and the grain of mustard seed, for example. But, first, these phenomena do not take place without the co-operation of other natural agents, as earth, water, air . . . these processes of growth and multiplication are carried forward so as to pass through their various stages in corresponding intervals of time. Here, on the contrary, in the multiplication of the loaves

> and fishes by Jesus, neither the one rule nor the other is observed: the bread in the hand of Jesus is no longer, like the stalk on which the corn grew, in communication with the maternal earth, nor is the multiplication gradual, but sudden.[60]

This, as we have seen, presents no overwhelming obstacle for Aquinas, Newman and Lewis. They agree that the bread is no longer grain in contact with the maternal earth. They did however, maintain that the bread is effectively, instrumentally and by the Incarnational union, in the human hands of the God of the 'maternal earth'. While it does not grow as wheat or barley in the soil, this God-Man causes bread to become what by its own powers and properties it could never become - more bread. The primary miracle of Incarnation provides a framing rationale for the specific miracle.

But Strauss is unobjectionably correct in objecting to any description of the event as an accelerated natural process. That would limit the miraculous to the time taken for an otherwise natural process.

> But herein, it is said, consists the miracle, which may be called the acceleration of a natural process. That which comes to pass in the space of three quarters of a year, from seed-time to harvest, was here effected in the minutes which were required for the distribution of the food.[61]

Strauss takes 'was here effected' to refer to the instrumental pathways or causal processes normally involved in the preparing of bread and cooked fish. The references to 'acceleration' are taken to indicate that the end product was achieved by the natural processes, only quicker.

> It would, indeed, have been an acceleration of a natural process, if in the hand of Jesus a grain of corn had borne fruit a hundred fold, and brought it to maturity, and if he had shaken the multiplied grain out of his hands as they were filled again and again, that the people might grind, knead, and bake it . . . or if he had taken a living fish, suddenly called forth the eggs from its body, and converted them into full-grown fish, which the disciples or the people might have broiled or roasted.[62]

In referring to miracle, one would in fact agree with Strauss in rejecting this understanding of the event. Miracle, as such, heightens the extent to which the end result cannot be accounted for by reference to the sum of natural properties of the initial ingredients. It demands definitive and novel acts of God.

> But it is not corn that he takes into his hand, but bread, and the fish also . . . broiled or salted . . . dead and modified by art.[63]

As we have seen already, Strauss considers that it is self-contradictory in some way to imagine that there is a God who could do this. However strange, the incarnational theists found no difficulty in accommodating such an event.

Turning to an issue raised by Mark and Matthew, that requires a response regardless of one's 'framing' theology, Strauss asks about double-accounts of this miracle. He is fully aware of the issues raised by the disciples' inept response to the second feeding miracle.

> Is it conceivable that the disciples, after they had themselves witnessed how Jesus was able to feed a great multitude with a small quantity of provision, should nevertheless on a second occasion of the same kind, have totally forgotten the first, and have asked, 'Whence should we have so much bread in the wilderness?' [64]

Strauss suggests that a number of stories of the same kind were in circulation, which the Evangelists assimilated into a double-feeding tradition. There was not, however, one underlying miracle. The basic story was 'a legendary production'.[65] By way of precedent, traditions of duplicate miracles occur in the Pentateuchal histories of the wilderness feedings (Exodus 16 and Numbers 11 - the provision of quails; Exodus 17 and Numbers 20 - the water from the rock).

Allowing, hypothetically, that a miracle occurred, Strauss wants to know how we are to picture it - 'either in the hands of Jesus, or in those of the disciples who dispensed the food, or in those of the people who received it?'[66] The problem of distributing tiny crumbs eliminate the last: Strauss opts for the first, itself suggesting the alternatives 'that as fast as one loaf or fish was gone, a new one came out of the hands of Jesus, or secondly, that the single loaves and fishes grew, so that as one piece was broken off, its loss was repaired, until on a calculation the turn came for the next loaf or fish'.[67] Of these, the second seems to be the mode indicated by the text, since it refers to fragments of the five loaves being taken up afterwards.

Strauss can only then reject this 'event' as belonging among the ridiculous, and only capable of being accepted as an event so long as it remains 'in the obscurity of an indefinite conception'.

> Loaves, which in the hands of the distributors expand like wetted sponges - broiled fish, in which the severed parts are replaced instantaneously, as in the living crab gradually, plainly belong to quite another domain than that of reality.[68]

All naturalistic reductions to an actual, non-miraculous event so patently depart from the sense of the text and into the realm of endless, imaginative reconstruction, that we may pass over them in full agreement with Strauss' criticisms, and we shall turn, finally, to uncover the 'positive reasons which render it probable that our narrative had an unhistorical origin'.[69]

Something of the challenge contained in the charge that the traditionalists can only accept the miracle while it lies under 'the obscurity of an indefinite conception' would have to, it seems to me, be responded to. One might try to imagine a scenario, working from the basis that the five loaves and two small fish were one boy's lunch. This would mean that the first occasion called for 5,000 multiplied by (5 + 2) items. If we then work on the not unreasonable assumption that each loaf and fish was replenished as Jesus broke it, this would amount to 35,000 acts of breaking or dividing the food. If one then said that it took three seconds for each act of breaking, Jesus would have been doing the miracle for somewhere around thirty hours continuously. One might want to say though, that the whole lot simply appeared on the first break - in which case the scene would indeed have been strewn with quite a store-room full! The incarnational theist might respond by saying that considerations like this are quite beside the point. They would just, having accepted the miracle, say that appropriate and sufficient supply was effected in a manner that the Evangelists did not think significant to comment on. I think Strauss' charge that this is to hide behind 'the obscurity of an indefinite conception' remains unanswered.

Strauss discusses the possibility that John embodies something like a mistaken concretization of Jesus' figurative references to bread and leaven, and of the spiritual references to bread from heaven.

> If, in figurative discourses, Jesus had sometimes represented himself as him who was able to give the true bread of life to the wandering and hungry people, perhaps also placing in opposition to this, the leaven of the Pharisees: the legend, agreeable to its realistic tendency, may have converted this into the fact of a miraculous feeding of the hungry multitude in the wilderness by Jesus.[70]

Not satisfied with this as a coherent explanation of the origin of the story, because the figurative hypothesis seems to apply chiefly to John and not to the Synoptics, Strauss turns to material in Exodus 16 to seek a source for this story, describing it as

> one of the most celebrated passages in the early history of the Israelites . . . perfectly adapted to engender the

expectation that its antitype would occur in the Messianic times.[71]

In maintaining that there is a connection between the Mosaic and the Gospel feedings, Strauss is quite in agreement with our three former apologists, who set the connection in primary history. Both the Mosaic and the Gospel miracles will have occurred (though here we exclude Lewis from the discussion because of the note of uncertainty that he introduced about Old Testament miracles). Whether or not we maintain a literal historicity for the miracles, the claim concerning the interdependence remains important for an interpretation of the Gospel texts. Bultmann, to whom we refer below, while equally dismissing emphasis on occurrence, also maintains that there is very little interaction between the Exodus and Gospel stories. In this wider context then, it is worth outlining Strauss' claims of parallel features in some detail.

> There appears a striking resemblance even in details. The locality in both places is the wilderness, the inducement to the miracle here as there, is fear lest the people should suffer from want in the wilderness, or perish from hunger; in the Old Testament history, this fear is expressed by the people in loud murmurs, in that of the New Testament, it results from the shortsightedness of the disciples, and the benevolence of Jesus. The direction of the latter to his disciples that they should give the people food, a direction which implies that he had already formed the design of feeding them miraculously, may be paralleled with the command which Jehovah gave to Moses to feed the people with manna (Exod. xvi. 4), and with quails (Exod. xvi. 12; Num. xi. 18-20). But there is another point of similarity which speaks yet more directly to our present purpose. As, in the evangelical narrative, the disciples think it an impossibility that provision for so great a mass of people should be procured in the wilderness, so, in the Old Testament history, Moses replied doubtingly to the promise of Jehovah to satisfy the people with flesh (Num. xi. 21f.) To Moses, as to the disciples, the multitude appears too great for the possibility of providing sufficient food for them; as the latter ask, whence they should have so much bread in the wilderness, so Moses asks ironically whether they should slay the flocks and the herds (which they had not). And as the disciples object, that not even the most impoverishing expenditure on their part would thoroughly meet the demand, so Moses, clothing the idea in another form, had declared, that to satisfy the people as Jehovah promised, an impossibility must happen (the fish of the sea be gathered together for them); objections which Jehovah there, as here Jesus, does not regard, but issues the command that the people should prepare for the reception of the miraculous food.[72]

Granted Strauss' claims of this detailed connection, this would point to a definite role for Exodus narrative in the interpretation of the Gospels themselves, particularly if some of these themes

were found to be even more widespread in the Gospels. Strauss keeps all occurrences of this miracle, whether Exodus or Gospel, at the level of legend or myth.

> Our examination has shown that the evangelical narrative was designedly composed so as to convey this (miraculous) sense, and if this sense was an element of the popular Jewish legend, then is the evangelical narrative without doubt a product of that legend.[73]

The Calming of the Sea and the Walking on the Water

Strauss' account of these stories places no emphasis on any historical event, miraculous or otherwise - all details are elements appropriate to the legend.

Jesus is the great successor to Moses, the Messiah coming in similar power, and he merely calms the sea rather than drying it up, because, being in a boat, they would be greatly inconvenienced by an exact repetition of this detail.[74]

Strauss does not even want to insist that the incident is dependent on any actual occasion of passage by boat so that 'a mythical addition should be engrafted on the stem of a real incident'. Even the narrative detail of Jesus being asleep is seen to be so apt, so illustrative of the principle of his unconcerned calm, that it is more readily understood as an appropriate image selected for the story, rather than as an historical reminiscence of that one occasion in ten when perhaps Jesus would have slept while sailing with the twelve.

> I am inclined to think that the legend would so far have understood her interest, that, as she had represented the contrast of the tranquility of Jesus with the raging of the elements to the intellect, by means of the words of Jesus, so she would depict it for the imagination, by means of the image of Jesus sleeping in the ship (or as Mark has it, on a pillow in the hinder part of the ship).[75]

It is more likely then, not that on one sea journey Jesus exhorted his disciples to show the firm courage of faith in opposition to the raging seas, but that just as he spoke of having faith as a grain of mustard seed that could pluck up mountains or trees, so in any situation he may have made use of the figure 'that to him who has faith, winds and seas shall be obedient at a word'.[76]

Once again, Strauss rightly rejects naturalistic-historico description; all attempts to attribute to Jesus an astute observation of the about-to-change-weather, or of a convenient lull concurring with his command. In opting for the mythical hypothesis, Strauss rejects the possibility of the literally miraculous in

the following way.

He disallows, from the start, the possibility of the Evangelist's description (Matthew 8: 27) of Jesus as him whom 'the winds and the sea obey'.

> Thus, to follow out the gradation in the miraculous which has been hitherto observed, it is here pre-supposed, not merely that Jesus could act on the human mind and living body in a psychological and magnetic manner, or with a revivifying power on the human organism when it was forsaken by vitality; nay, not merely as in the history of the draught of fishes earlier examined, that he could act immediately with determinative power, on irrational yet animated existences, but that he could act thus even on inanimate nature.[77]

Strauss comes to the crux of the miraculous - that Jesus' human command controls what we know to be immediately due to atmospheric conditions of local high and low pressure systems. Hence,

> The possibility of finding a point of union between the alleged supernatural agency of Jesus, and the natural order of phenomena, here absolutely ceases.[78]

In that sense, Strauss is precisely correct - for we possess no general theory by which the utterance of the command 'Peace! Be still!' should have any effect on a storm. As merely human words expressing a command embodying human desires, they remain impotent in this context. Furthermore, Strauss' conceptual field was so formed as to exclude the possibility that in a unique Incarnation, God could instrumentally empower this human voice to cause the calm.

Strauss rejects the idea that storms, beasts of prey, poisonous plants etc., are the result of a Fall. This is fanatical and childish. The dominion that man (re) gains over nature is not from a miraculous redemption, but is gained by progressive reflection, by the invention of the steam vessel and the compass.[79]

We might add that the Evangelists have here depicted Jesus as one who already in the pre-Easter history, dominates the panoply of natural forces. If, for imagination's sake, we considered that the boat foundered casting all into the sea, would the lungs of Him, who can command both wind and sea and walk upon it, fill with water following the exhaustion of his limbs? Or would he merely re-iterate the miracle of striding across the top of the foaming elements? In that sense, Strauss is again correct to say,

> But for courage to be shown, real danger must be apprehended: now for Jesus, supposing him to be conscious of an immediate power over nature, danger could in no degree exist: therefore he could not here give any proof of this theoretical power.[80]

Extrapolating to the crucifixion, we might at once ask about the possibility of Him whom wind and sea obey, being not only subject to death, but even capable of dying. It is not far to travel from the miracle of calming the storm to the picture most clearly in John of Jesus both laying down His life and taking it up again as an act of complete, autonomous freedom and power, subject to no external constraints whatsoever.

Strauss concludes, that in addition to motifs of miracles at sea, available from extra-biblical sources, there are sufficient Old and New Testament sources to account for the formation of this story. The legend may have come to frame the image of Kingdom of God as a voyage through a stormy sea, with Jesus, the Messiah surpassing Moses, as the pilot of the boat.

Turning to the miracle of walking on the water, he writes,

> The body of Jesus appears so entirely exempt from a law which governs all other human bodies without exception, namely, the law of gravitation, that he not only does not sink under the water, but does not even dip into it; on the contrary, he walks erect on the waves as on firm land.[81]

In Strauss' judgement, this is absolutely impossible. Either Jesus' body would be docetic illusion, or else we submit to the childish and fantastical idea that Jesus' spiritual activity not only freed him from passion and sensuality but refined and perfected his corporeal nature. As an historical appearance on the sea, only the not very useful idea of a spectre remains. Furthermore, that Jesus was submerged at his baptism indicates that he would have had to have had a power of sustaining himself on the surface which he then refrained from using, or else, the capacity to increase or reduce his specific gravity at will.

Strauss seems to be correct to object to discussions of the miracle confined to the question of whether Jesus had the power to alter his specific gravity at will. The objection is similar to his objection to the feeding miracle being understood as an acceleration of natural processes, of intervening processes. Altering specific gravity seems to suggest a dependence on means necessary to achieve an end. As if a glandular-hormonal or nervous system pathway were issued with a command to 'lighten every body cell'. Of such a process, we have, and I would say, can have no knowledge, beyond desire and imagination. It would be like trying to understand the ascension as the floating upwards of a man who had made himself as light as Helium by will-power.

The only alternative, it seems to me, would be to move directly to the miracle as depicted, and assert its facticity in terms of the power of God who creates man, and water, and who can immediately effect what he desires in nature, without distortion or disruption. And that is, in one sense, not to explain the miracle, but merely to accept it.

Having rightly rejected naturalistic reductions to an allegedly underlying non-miraculous history (in fact walking on or near the shore, on a sandbank, on a plank of wood, etc.) Strauss says,

> and therefore, to abolish the miraculous, we must not explain it away from the narrative, but rather enquire whether the narrative itself, either in whole or in part, must not be excluded from the domain of history.[82]

Again, showing how the miraculous must stand or fall as a whole, and not piecemeal, Strauss is averse to any attempts to divorce Matthew's depiction of Peter joining Jesus on the sea from the miracle of Jesus himself walking there.[83] The two stand together in the mythical or legendary mode of representing some aspect of the Kingdom of God, and faith. Apart from it only being mentioned in Matthew, it is as equally impossible as Jesus himself walking there.

> Admitting that Jesus, by means of his etherealized body, could walk on the water, how could he command Peter, who was not gifted with such a body, to do the same? Or, if by a mere word he could give the body of Peter a dispensation from the law of gravitation, can he have been a man? And if a God, would he thus lightly cause a suspension of natural laws at the caprice of a man? Or, lastly, are we to suppose that faith has the power instantaneously to lessen the specific gravity of the body of a believer?[84]

Even allowing that a union between God and Man makes many things possible by recourse to God in his power and freedom to act, a more fundamental question would have to be asked concerning the internal consistency of the history. If Peter joins Jesus on the water because Jesus enables him to share in the power of his Union with God, even anticipating the Resurrection life, then Peter's incomprehension of the subsequent event, his denial of Jesus, his lack of preparedness for the Resurrection becomes an almost insurmountable stumbling block. Here, he already participates in the Resurrection power of the new nature (Lewis), but he is still incapable of learning what it is that Jesus hastens to,

even though, according to Mark, he is told at least three times by this same Jesus. We have, rather, according to Strauss,

> an allegorical and mythical representation of that trial of faith which this disciple who imagined himself so strong, met so weakly, and which higher assistance alone enabled him to surmount.[85]

To a person who had seen Jesus dominate the elements so totally, and participated in that power, the real expectation of a triumph on the cross more complete and profound, would have, one reasonably imagines, been readily induced by the combination of miracle and direct reference. Seen from this perspective, Strauss' metaphysical objections to miracles carry less weight than observations emerging internally to the Gospels themselves, but both are of some significance.

A further objection, internal to the Gospels, concerns his interpretation of the walking on the water in John, and its differences from the accounts in Matthew and Mark. The difference is grounded in a translation of the Greek, which indicates that in John, Jesus did not in fact enter the boat, despite the disciples' desire that he so do, since they immediately reached land. This is not a Straussian peculiarity of interpretation, and he refers to Chrysostom's interpretation to the same end, and his subsequent belief that 'there were two occasions on which Jesus walked on the sea'. This occasion, on which he does not enter the boat is called the greater miracle, and its authenticity is enhanced by the fact that the multitude who were fed by the previous miracle, infer that the passage across the sea was miraculous, adding to their knowledge of Jesus' miracles. Multiplying the number of instances of miracle should not embarrass a believer in Jesus' miracles, for being able to do the wonders, he obviously had something of a capacity or faculty for them. Of this extreme, Strauss writes,

> Not contented with the representation of his informant, that Jesus, on this one occasion, adopted this extraordinary mode of progress with special reference to his disciples, he aims by the above addition to convey the idea of walking on the water being so natural and customary with Jesus, that without any regard to the disciples, whenever a sheet of water lay in his road, he walked across it as unconcernedly as if it had been dry land.[86]

Strauss also observes that quite a sizable fleet would have been required to get even a small proportion of the wilderness crowd, and he concludes that this passage is a purely invented feature of the story.[87]

He concludes that the same sources and motifs lie behind the walking on the water, as the calming of the storm - the crossing dryshod of the Red Sea, of Elisha dividing the Jordan by a stroke of his mantle, his causing a piece of sunken iron to float, and of Jehovah being said to walk upon the sea as a pavement; and the Greek and Greco-oriental legends and superstitions where miracle-workers possessed dominion over the sea. There is, then, the possibility that 'a similar legend should be formed concerning Jesus'. In a manner reminiscent of Hume's scepticism, he concludes that this is much more likely than the occurrence of a literal miracle in which Jesus walked on the water.

The Three Resuscitations from the Dead

Strauss presents an accurate, cogent and fair summary of the issues raised by there being three accounts of the restoration of Jairus' daughter, one of the raising of the widow's son, and one, in John, of the raising of Lazarus. In particular, his discussion and rejection of the naturalistic hypothesis that denies a real death in each case is concise and not capable of being bettered. Hence, he comes to the alternative:

> What we have done with the two first narratives of resuscitations, is with the last and most remarkable history of this kind, effected by the various successive attempts at explanation themselves, namely, to reduce the subject to the alternative: that we either receive the event as supernatural, according to the representation of the evangelical narrative, or, if we find it incredible as such, deny that the narrative has an historical character.[88]

So Strauss depicts the essence of the events and their connection with the other miracles of Jesus. They stand at the apogee of impossibility.

> We have hitherto been ascending a ladder of miracles; first, cures of mental disorders, then of all kinds of bodily maladies in which, however, the organization of the sufferer was not so injured as to cause the cessation of consciousness and life; and now, the revivification of bodies, from which the life has actually departed. This progression in the marvellous is, at the same time, a gradation in inconceivability.[89]

Strauss judges that the gradation in inconceivability here reaches its peak because we have passed beyond the realm in which anything might be effected by mental action, by a word or by a look. For a word to be understood, cognitive capacities must be present - and,

> The more deeply the malady appeared to have penetrated into the entire corporeal system, the more inconceivable to us was a cure of this kind. . . . The corpse from which life

> and consciousness have flown has lost the last fulcrum for the power of the miracle worker; it perceives him no longer - receives no impressions from him; for the very capability of receiving impressions must be conferred on him anew. But to confer this, that is, to give life in the proper sense, is a creative act, and to think of this being exercised by a man, we must confess to be beyond our power.[90]

Now it must be said that at the same time as stating why he disbelieves in the possibility of the dead being restored by a man's command, Strauss has in fact provided an essential description of what constitutes the event as a miracle. His argument in fact amounts to saying 'This is a miracle, and miracles are strictly speaking, impossible events'. That is, his metaphysics disallow the possibility of there being any way in which the human command of Jesus could literally be a creative command of God that bestows life and even the capacity, amongst other things, to 'hear' such commands, and obey them.

Strauss refers to Woolston (Disc. 5) on the gradation among the miracles, from the Jairus account where the girl has just died, through the Nain story, where the deceased is on the way to burial, and concluding with Lazarus, dead and buried for four days. Each event is, by the degree that it exceeds the preceding, more inconceivable. Further difficulties also exist in providing a motive for raising either of these three persons when prominent figures like John the Baptist are left dead[91] and furthermore, nothing is made of these people once raised, as if nothing has happened to them that is worth pursuing or making anything of. Strauss also judges that John's depiction of Jesus deliberately waiting for Lazarus to die, in order to promote his own position, is unacceptable.[92] Furthermore, the disciples learn nothing from the raising of Jairus' daughter, which ought to have prepared them for the possibility of Jesus acting similarly here. Strauss also objects to the idea of an historical Jesus praying to the Father, not out of lively emotion or need, but for the crowd's benefit.

More significantly, perhaps, Strauss cannot understand why Matthew and Mark in choosing to narrate only one resurrection or resuscitation, chose Jairus' daughter and not the Lukan miracle of the widow's son.[93] And assuming that the latter happened, it is inconceivable that it remained unknown to the others. Incomparably more difficult is the confining of the Lazarus event to <u>John</u>.

> If the authors or collectors of the three first gospels knew of this, they would not, for more than one reason, avoid introducing it into their writings. For, first, of all the resuscitations effected by Jesus, nay, of all his miracles, this resurrection of Lazarus, if not the most wonderful, is yet the one in which the marvellous presents itself the most obviously and strikingly, and which, therefore, if its historical reality can be established, is a pre-eminently strong proof of the extraordinary endowments of Jesus as a divine messenger.[94]

In addition, according to John, this resuscitation had an immediate effect on Jesus' fate, sealing as it were, his doom. Again, the Synoptics know nothing of this. In my opinion, the reason offered by apologists to circumvent this gaping omission are fairly overturned by Strauss.[95]
So Strauss reaches his absolute rejection of the supernatural historicity of this incident.

> We . . . distinctly declare that we regard the history of the resurrection of Lazarus, not only as in the highest degree improbable in itself, but also destitute of external evidence, and this whole chapter, in connection with those previously examined, as an indication of the unauthenticity of the fourth gospel.[96]

As with the other miracles, Strauss then outlines the sources from which he says that the Evangelists will have worked up their miracle stories - the expectation among rabbinical and New Testament sources that the Messiah would raise the dead at his coming. Furthermore, accounts of specific resuscitations were to be found in the Old Testament, again pertaining to Elijah and Elisha, Elijah in particular raising the son of a widow as Jesus did at Nain. In a curious inverse, the bones of the long dead Elisha receive a corpse thrown upon them. Thus -

> the resurrections in the New Testament are nothing more than mythi, which had their origin in the tendency of the early Christian church, to make her Messiah agree with the type of the prophets, and with the Messianic ideal.[97]

Again, the parallels in Philostratus (Vita Apoll.) are noted.

Strauss' judgements about Jesus' miracles are not isolated opinions but cohere with wider beliefs about God and Incarnation. As the judgements about miracle depart from belief in their occurrence, so do his concepts of God and Incarnation vary. It must be said that for Strauss, the rather more metaphysical issues can be directly addressed in their own right. Their intrinsic value and credibility does not stand or fall with the particular issues that emerge purely from the internal sense of the gospels. However, as all the theologians discussed

to date bear witness, these beliefs do interact with the miracle-stories in question.

In my assessment, many of Strauss' observations about internal-to-the-gospels issues are astute and fair, and demand an answer regardless of one's wider theology. One of the chief points lies in the tension between the disciples who witness events of unprecedented magnitude, who yet remain incapable of being prepared for Resurrection.

The End-point of the Miraculous in Jesus' Life

The Resurrection

In the same way that Strauss dismissed attempts to amalgamate Matthean and Lukan infancy narratives into one, consistent historical tableau, he rejects all attempts to amalgamate material from the four gospels into one historically consistent account of the Resurrection appearances.

> To escape from this restless running to and fro of the disciples and the women, this phantasmagoric appearance, disappearance and re-appearance of the angels and the useless repetition of the appearances of Jesus before the same person, which result from the harmonistic method, we must consider each Evangelist by himself: we then obtain from each a quiet picture with simple dignified features.[98]

Even so, Strauss concludes that 'we have before us nothing more than traditional reports' in which in many details, particularly the angelic appearances,

> A correct discernment will here also rather recognize the forms of the Jewish popular conception, by which the primitive christian tradition held it necessary to glorify the resurrection of its Messiah.[99]

Any interpretation of the Resurrection accounts has to respond to the corporeal dimension and its miraculous character. For Strauss, these features cannot in any sense be literal or historical. They contain various 'contradictory' features that can only co-exist in the mythical outlook of that age.

> That Jesus ate and drank was, in the circle of ideas within which the gospels originated, as far from presupposing a real necessity, as the meal of which Jehovah partook with two angels in the tent of Abraham: the power of eating is here no proof of a necessity for eating. That he caused himself to be touched, was the only possible mode of refuting the conjecture that an incorporeal spectre had appeared to the disciples; moreover, divine existences, not merely in Grecian, but also . . . in Hebrew antiquity, sometimes appeared palpable in distinction from unsubstantial shades, though they otherwise showed themselves as little

> bound by the laws of materiality as the palpable Jesus, when he suddenly vanished, and was able to penetrate without hindrance into a room of which the door was closed.[100]

What he has said here seems to be a fair and accurate summary of what the Evangelists intended. This intent is set against his own determination of the limits of the possible in nature and history.

> It is quite another question, whether on our more advanced position, and with our more correct knowledge of nature, those two different classes of particulars can be held compatible with each other. Here we must certainly say: a body which consumes visible food, must itself be visible; the consumption of food presupposes an organism, but an organism is organized matter, and this has not the property of alternatively vanishing and becoming visible again at will. More especially, if the body of Jesus was capable of being felt, and presented perceptible flesh and bones, it thus exhibited the impenetrability of matter proper to it as solid: if on the other hand he was able to pass into closed houses and rooms, unhindered by the interposition of walls and doors, he thus proved that the impenetrability of solid matter did not belong to him. Since then according to the evangelical accounts he must at the same time have had and not have had the same property: the evangelical representation of the corporeality of Jesus after the resurrection is manifested to be contradictory.[101]

This objection seems to me, whatever other advantages it may have, to miss the point that in this case, we are not referring to a being who is said to still exist within the limits of nature as we know it. The contradiction as such only exists within that domain. We seem to be in a somewhat more agnostic situation when we come to say what would, and what would not, be possible and proper for the first Resurrected person to engage in. It is then, the whole idea of Resurrection that Strauss objects to, rather than to particular violations of what is possible <u>within</u> nature.

It is in <u>John</u> that the self-contradiction is said to be most manifest - 'Jesus, immediately after he has entered into the closed room unimpeded by walls and doors, causes the doubting Thomas to touch him.'[102] This, for Strauss, is the height of impossibility. Strauss offers his own explanation of Resurrection. Jesus' body stayed in the ground. The disciples remained imbued with their belief in Jesus as Messiah, a belief formed over the years with him. Only at first was his death a shock to their belief. Now, 'the earlier impression began to revive: there spontaneously arose in them the psychological necessity of solving the contradiction between the ultimate fate of Jesus and their earlier opinion of him'.[103] The idea of a risen Messiah emerged

out of their pondering on Old Testament texts about the sufferings of the man of God as afflicted and bowed down to death (Isa. Liii., Ps. xxii). In some way, then, Jesus as this Messiah, enters into his glory. Again, somehow, from this glory, this Messiah must give word of himself to his followers - and 'when in moments of unwonted inspiration their hearts burned within them (Luke 24.34) - how could they avoid conceiving this to be an influence shed on them by their glorified Christ'?[104]

In time, and of necessity, the women heightened these impressions, 'into actual vision'. The absence of the body is accounted for because the group has withdrawn to Galilee where its known locality can be no restraint to such happenings. When they return to Jerusalem to proclaim the message, 'it was no longer possible by the sight of the body of Jesus either to convict themselves, or to be convicted by others'.[105]

The timing in Acts, seven weeks after the death, is itself a purely dogmatic feature. As it happens, no mere simplicity can surround the whole scenario, but it -

> must be surrounded and embellished with all the pomp which the Jewish imagination furnished. The chief ornaments which stood at command for this purpose, were angels: hence these must open the grave.[106]

The Ascension

The Ascension is faced with all the arguments against miracle that Strauss has marshalled to this point.

> The first impression from this narrative is clearly this: that it is intended as a description of a miraculous event, an actual exaltation of Jesus into heaven, as the dwelling-place of God, and an attestation of this by angels; as orthodox theologians, both ancient and modern, correctly maintain. The only question is, whether they can also help us to surmount the difficulties which stand in our way when we attempt to form a conception of such an event? Our main difficulty is this: how can a palpable body, which has still flesh and bones, and eats material food, be qualified for a celestial abode? How can it so far liberate itself from the laws of gravity, as to be capable of an ascent through the air? And how can it be conceived that God gave so preternatural a capability to Jesus by a miracle?[107]

Leaving aside as merely humorous, the naturalistic resolution of an historical, normal sub-stratum[108] we can briefly outline the 'supernaturalist' accounts to which Strauss refers. He rejects suggestions of a process of 'evaporation' or 'subtilization', but in the manner that these claims are couched, they are rather more naturalistic than miraculous. An 'evaporated' body would be rather light, and could no doubt float lightly

upwards on the wind. It is apparent that this is not the kind of transformation envisaged by Aquinas.

Strauss also objects to the Ascension because it suggests that God's throne is somewhere in the upper reaches of the air.[109] Both Aquinas and Lewis responded to this claim in an intelligible way, and where Lewis saw an appropriate preparation in myths of ascent and the imaginative impact of the sky on the religious mind, Strauss can only see a mistaken picture of reality.

> Thus there would be no other resource than to suppose a divine accommodation to the idea of the world in that age, and to say: God, in order to convince the disciples of the return of Jesus into the highest world, although the world is in reality by no means to be sought for in the upper air, nevertheless prepared the spectacle of such an exaltation. But this is to represent God as theatrically imagining an illusion.[110]

Strauss answers the question to his own satisfaction by positing a number of bases out of which the imagination constructs the visible Ascension into heaven.

> When Matthew makes Jesus before the tribunal of the high priest predict his exaltation to the right hand of the divine power (xxvi. 64) and after his resurrection declare that now all power is given to him in heaven and earth (xxviii. 18) and nevertheless has nothing of a visible ascension, but on the contrary puts into the mouth of Jesus the assurance: 'I am with you even unto the end of the world' . . . it is evident that the latent idea, on which his representation is founded, is that Jesus, doubtless immediately on his resurrection, ascended invisibly to the Father, though at the same time remaining invisibly with his followers.[111]

Out of his invisibility emerge visible christophanies. Other New Testament writers also presume nothing more than the messianic message of Psalm 110.1 'Sit thou at my right hand' - deciding nothing of the manner or representation of this exaltation. On this basis,

> The imagination of the primitive Christians must however have felt a strong temptation to depict this exaltation as a brilliant spectacle.[112]

Again, the Danielic expectation of a return from heaven - a visible descent on the clouds would -

> naturally suggest that his departure to heaven should be represented as a visible ascent on a cloud.[113]

Having used these sources he does not need to make specific use of other Old Testament 'precedents' (Genesis 5:24, Elijah in 2 Kings 11.11, and the Greek and Roman apotheoses of Hercules and Romulus).

In conclusion, I would say that there are few reasons why we should accept the re-application of Incarnation to the human race, rather than to one man (p. 150). I remain unconvinced by Strauss's claims about the limits of Divine causality, power and freedom to act (pp. 159-61). However, he has given a cogent alternative to those accounts which otherwise present Jesus as historical and miraculous from beginning to end. For Strauss, a natural, human existence has been supplanted or intensified in a miraculizing or myth-making process. Hence, he offers specific interpretations of miracle stories that by no means insist on historicity as a pre-requisite for significance, and looks to a wide-range of sources to account for them (pp. 162, 174).

Strauss' clear distinction between the natural and the miraculous (pp. 170-1), while not proving that miracles are impossible, increases the force of the claim that did they occur, their impact must have been little short of overwhelming. They should, then, have had a determinative impact on the twelve (see, again, Chapter VIII). For example, consider Peter on the water (p. 178). Strauss had the effect on me of bringing out the hitherto hidden sense of the bizarre in miracles (p. 173).

Most significantly, many of Strauss' claims are effectively independent of the question of which theology or world-view is brought to bear on a Gospel. These include the issues of non-response and failure to learn from miracles (pp. 172, 181), the lack of cogent reasons for the Synoptic Evangelists to prefer the lesser miracles of re-vivification (pp. 181-2), and his sensitivity to the differences from Gospel to Gospel (pp. 155, 181, 183), all of which compound the difficulties with a Jesus who already, prior to Resurrection, dominates the panoply of natural forces (pp. 176-7). Strauss is likely to be correct on the popular character of exorcism stories, particularly the Gadarene Demoniac (pp. 166-70), and by comparison, Newman's apology is somewhat lame (p. 94).

Strauss presents a challenge to the conservative who might begin with the notion that, after all, there are few difficulties with Jesus' human commands and acts bringing about what otherwise exceeds the powers and limits of the human state.

CHAPTER VII

RUDOLF BULTMANN: THE CRITICAL DISSOLUTION OF MIRACLE

Miracles of Origin and End

Conception

For Bultmann, Jesus' life did not begin with a miraculous conception, nor did his personal history 'terminate' with the complete human being, corpse included, leaving the tomb, albeit in a transformed, Resurrection state. The evacuation of the miraculous from the beginning and the end is matched by a similar elimination from any intervening history. To the extent then that the New Testament presents us with a miraculous Jesus, it is judged not to be presenting us with a possible or actual figure of history.

In discussing Matthew's account of the miraculous conception, Bultmann maintains that 'an originally Semitic report is the basis of this story'.[1] This simply contained an angelic promise to Joseph that his son would be Messiah. Bultmann refers to the Curetonian Syriac and Sinaitic Syriac textual variants that read at 1:21 'She will bear thee a child'. And again, the 'antenatal naming of the child, with an associated prophecy, is a traditional motif of Old Testament and Jewish literature'.[2]

As Matthew 1:18-25 now stands, Matthew has added the reference to Is. 7:14, and the provision of a translation for 'Jesus' suggests a move into a Hellenistic realm. The central element of miraculous conception also emerges with this shift into Hellenism, and does not belong to the original story:

> Admittedly this could not have then contained the motif unheard of in a Jewish environment, of a virgin birth. It was first added in the transformation in Hellenism, where the idea of the generation of a king or hero from a virgin by the godhead was widespread.[3]

Supporting this claim, he adds that the idea of generation by God or gods is not only foreign to the Old Testament and to Judaism,

but is quite impossible to them:

> The idea of the Virgin Birth of the Messiah in particular is foreign to Judaism; cp. Strack-B. I, 49f, ('As against Jewish thought Matt. 1:18 is something completely new').[4] *

Bultmann handles the Lukan annunciation in a similar manner. He distinguishes an earlier semitic element from the later Hellenistic Christian stream in which the specifically miraculous is found. Thus Luke 1:34-37 are 'a secondary addition, in all probability made by Luke himself'.[5]

In its original form, the story contained the angelic message in which Mary is told that she will conceive (by the man to whom she is betrothed), and will conceive the future Messianic king (vv. 31-33) to which she assents (v. 38) 'Let it be to me according to your word'.

The Magi's Star and the Darkness at the Crucifixion

Parallels and potential origins for the Magi-story are suggested. He refers to the Arabian cult of Dusares in which,

> the feast of the birth of the God from his virgin mother was celebrated (on Dec. 25th?) with the presentation of gifts such as money, ointments and incense.[6]

This cult may have even had a shrine at Bethlehem. As Strauss did, so Bultmann collects ancient parallels to the motif of the star pointing the way to the birth of the king.

> The fact that the star shows the way is a novelistic usage or a combination of the main motif with another. The star whose rise the Magi saw was originally a man's heavenly double, which rose with his birth and set at his death . . . a guiding star is an idea to be met with in the tradition of antiquity.[7]

It remains most likely that the story of the Magi's journey makes use of 'a folk saga or a fairy-tale motif'.

Bultmann provides further material that illuminates this story as it is now found in Matthew. While story details and theme may have a source in folk saga or even fairy-tale, the issue is now to do with the role of the star at the beginning of this Gospel. In 'Star Worship, Fatalism and Astrology' he gives an

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* The recent commentary by Raymond E. Brown is in complete agreement with Bultmann on this point, though he remains open to the possibility of real miracle at Jesus' origin. Raymond E. Brown, The Birth of the Messiah, pp. 524 & 527.

account of the significance of stars in the outlook of the Hellenistic age. They are understood, variously, as supernatural beings, objects of worship and contemplation suggesting a means of escape from life in this lower, troubled realm, as principal features of fatalism, where chance, fortune and necessity govern all and the stars exert a real power over human life and its destiny.

> This sense of helplessness in the hands of fate, of living in a world where it is impossible to plan their future, makes men wonder whether it is possible to be at home in the world at all. The world becomes a hostile, alien place. It was just this mood that led men to turn to star worship, where they found just what they wanted. For that worship implied that the universe was not a harmonious unity, but that it was split into two spheres, the lower, sublunary world, and the world of the stars. Moreover, the lower world was not centred in itself, but was under the control of the stars. Everything that happened in this lower world was determined by what went on in the world of the stars. Hence, in the last resort all activity here is trivial and meaningless, and if it seems to be independent, that is a mere illusion. . . . But this kind of fatalism can just as easily degenerate into superstition. The world of the stars . . . becomes the object of veneration. The wise man . . . strives frantically to attain the vision of this world. He turns his back on this life with its wild ambitions and lusts. 'The contemplation of the sky has become a communion.' By contemplating the harmonious movements of the stars the devotee himself 'participates in their immortality, and already, before his appointed hour, converses with the gods'.[8]

He also refers to belief in stars as world rulers and lords of time, where history is believed to be 'not governed by its own immanent laws . . . (but) . . . is subjected to the changes of time governed by the motions of the stars'.[9] It is in this context that Bultmann introduces the Christian Gospel, referring to Paul on the Christians' freedom from the 'elements of the world', the heavenly στοιχεῖα or 'elemental spirits of the universe' (Gal. 4:3-9). Though Bultmann does not himself draw out the specific connection, it seems to me that the beginning to Matthew, with its reference to the star that guides the wise men to Jesus, directs men away from all adoration and subjection to the stars, since here, one of their number leaves its fixed position and comes down to point out the one who is thus made out to be greater than it, surpassing it in dignity, honour, position and power. I can readily conceive of the Gospel emerging from Jesus' Resurrection, forming this story of the Magi and the 'obedient' star as part of the account of the origins of the one

who is now put forward as the means of human salvation. Salvation is not a matter of fate and the stars, but of the 'fate' of this man, already pointed out in infancy by the stars which are subject to him.

The darkness at the crucifixion raises no historical-astronomical issues, and does not depend in any way upon an appeal to miracle to account for a diminution of the sun's light. From Bultmann's response to the wonders at the cross, we assume that for all we know, as a matter of history, uninterrupted sunlight could have illuminated the actual death. But the Gospels are not simply concerned with this. Of Mark 15:33-39 par., Bultmann writes,

> This account is strongly disfigured by legend. . . .
> vv. 33 and 38 go together: the τέρατα at the death of Jesus and their impression on the Gentile onlookers. We cannot view this as an ancient report, but only as Christian legend.[10]

The Resurrection and Ascension

The miraculous conception is a later product of the tradition, not an event at the beginning of Jesus' life. The Resurrection narratives are interpreted in a similar way. The stories in which the grave is found empty, and a rather corporeal, tactile Jesus appears and disappears, are not accounts of events that literally happened, but belong to legend or myth.

Bultmann does believe that the Resurrection story in Mark did not end at 16:8 where we find it now concludes. The lost ending contained an account of Resurrection appearance to the disciples in Galilee.[11] The fact remains that 16:1-8 is not itself an original account of events, or an early tradition that neatly completes preceding material. 'The accounts of the empty grave, of which Paul still knows nothing, are legends.'[12]

The disjunction between 16:1-8 and the preceding material is indicated by the women being named again after being mentioned at 15:47. Furthermore, their stated intention of going to embalm the body clashes with the intended finality with which the stone has been rolled against the tomb 15:46. The hypothesis of a lost ending telling of the Galilean appearance to the disciples is justified because the women's stated reaction of saying nothing to anyone 'can be neither the original meaning of the whole story nor have accorded with the intentions of v. 7' - which tells of the angelic command to inform the disciples of the forthcoming Galilean appearance.

Appearance stories found in the other Gospels are legendary in quality. The encounter on the Walk to Emmaus (Lk. 24:13-25), 'has all the character of a legend' and Bultmann, refers to work by Gunkel, to identify the style of the story as the equal of those found in Genesis. 'Christ appears here as the unknown traveller - in the way that God of old liked to walk among men.'[13]

Other stories in Matthew 28 and Luke 24, 'give the impression of being self-conscious literary work and at least have to be styled editorial'.[14] Similarly Jesus' final departure (Lk. 24:50-53) is also a literary creation - the Ascension was not told by the Synoptists, and it is the editor of Acts who introduces an Ascension legend there.

> According to 1Cor. 15:5-8, where Paul enumerates the appearances of the risen Lord as tradition offered them, the resurrection of Jesus meant simultaneously his exaltation; not until later was the resurrection interpreted as a temporary return to life on earth, and this idea then gave rise to the ascension story.[15]

Bultmann reduces the Resurrection material to two principal streams - stories of the empty tomb, and of the appearances. Mark 16:1-8, with its basic reference to the empty tomb tradition, which, though a legend, is an attempt to prove the reality of Jesus' Resurrection by means of this 'fact'.[16] It is now read in combination with the angelic message pointing to a Galilean appearance, a story with a separate origin of its own.

Other separable elements emerge. The missionary charge, and all the Johannine stories for example. He calls them

> A quite late achievement of Hellenistic Christianity (if not also in part of Hellenistic Jewish-Christianity). For these stories presuppose the universal mission, as something authorized by a command of the risen Lord. The primitive Church knew nothing of this, as Gal. 2:7 clearly shows.[17]

There was then a more limited content to the stories of Jesus' appearance. Primarily, a missionary task to Israel was contained in them -

> given in the certainty that Jesus was risen from the dead and that as risen Lord he was the coming Messiah. And this and nothing else must have been the content of the oldest stories of the Easter appearances, just as it was the content of Paul's vision on the Damascus road.[18]

Little is recoverable of historical events surrounding a so-called Resurrection - 'The original Easter happenings are almost as good as overlaid by legend'.[19]

Bultmann finds a critique of miracle and of Resurrection

appearances being offered in John.

> The doubt of Thomas is representative of the common attitude of men, who cannot believe without seeing miracles (4:48). As the miracle is a concession to the weakness of man, so is the appearance of the Risen Jesus a concession to the weakness of the disciples. Fundamentally they ought not to need it! [20]

Bultmann maintains, that from John's point of view, they should have been convinced by Jesus' word alone (2:22). Both this appearance and the one to Mary are not to be taken by any reader or hearer as

> narrations of events that he himself could wish to hope to experience, nor as a substitute for such experiences of his own, as if the experiences of others could, as it were, guarantee for him the reality of the resurrection of Jesus.[21]

The accounts of Resurrection appearances are not accounts of events in which Jesus literally appeared in a somewhat supernatural, miraculous and yet historical manner. They do not, when properly understood, tell of special events that provide a legitimate, cognitive content for a basis of faith - the fact of an empty tomb, and the fact of a transformed body and soul. Rather,

> They are to be viewed as proclaimed word, in which the recounted events have become symbolic pictures for the fellowship which the Lord, who has ascended to the Father, holds with his own.[22]

As Ascension may be viewed as itself something of a 'symbolic picture', the miraculous end of Jesus might not, for us, penetrate beyond an ontology of symbol.

The Intervening Miracles

Apophthegms and Miracle Story

A number of the accounts of Jesus' miracles are in fact secondary framing material, providing a context for a brief statement or pronouncement - the 'apophthegm' -

> A species of traditional material which might well be reckoned as stories - viz. such units as consist of sayings of Jesus set in a brief context . . . many apophthegms can be reduced to bare dominical sayings by determing the secondary character of their frame, and can thus be compared, in the following part of the book, with other sayings of Jesus.[23]

Mark 2:1-12 and 3:1-6 are both apophthegmatic miracle stories. We shall look at his interpretation of these miracle stories, and begin with a content outline of the former.

The Healing of The Paralytic whose sins were Forgiven

vv. 1-2 Return to, and location in house; the crowd gathered about.

vv. 3-4	Paralytic brought by bearers; removal of roof to reach Jesus, due to impassable crowd.
v. 5a	Jesus responds to 'their faith' and says
v. 5b	'My son, your sins are forgiven.'
vv. 6-7	This act occasions opposition and hostility from the scribes, who consider that this is blasphemy, exercising a prerogative which is God's alone. Their questioning is however 'in their hearts'.
vv. 8-10	Jesus perceives what is in their hearts, and raises, in the form of a counter-question, the alternative - forgiveness of sins or healing from paralysis. He suggests that both are equally easy, or indeed difficult to effect, but more significantly, both are equally his proper acts. He then announces that he will heal the man's paralysis as a sign of his (the Son of man's) authority to forgive sins.
v. 11	The healing command - 'Rise, take up your pallet'. The report of the immediate healing, the crowds response of amazement, the glorification of God, and their attesting to never having seen anything like this.

Bultmann judges that verses 5b-10 are a secondary interpolation into what was originally a pure miracle story.[24] Originally, the story had Jesus, on seeing 'their faith', move directly to the authoritative command in verse 11 'Rise, take up your pallet'. An organically complete miracle story has the controversy interpolated. He says that this is supported by the observation that interest in the faith of the paralytic and his friends (vv. 3, 4, 5a) disappears (vv.5b-10), indicating that only in vv. 11-12 is there a return to the proper conclusion of the miracle story. The argument for an interpolation here is augmented by referring to the lack of subsequent interest in those who had opposed Jesus in their questioning hearts, and whose hostility was portrayed in vv. 5b-10.

> After 5b-10 one wants to ask: 'What is the impression on the opponents? Are they to be counted among the δοξάζοντες in v. 12?' It is much more likely that their silence would be reported, as in 3, 4, etc! So the discussion in vv. 5b-10 is interpolated.[25]

Bultmann is sure, then, that we do not have a straightforward account of a miracle in a specific context, lifted directly or mimetically from Jesus' life. We have a composite narrative structure formed from a miracle story and a tradition of dispute about the right to forgive sins. Whether even the brief sayings of Jesus go back to utterances that he himself made, or could have made, is a further question. Since it is only in Lk. 7:47, where the woman of the city anoints Jesus that there is another reference

to the tradition of Jesus forgiving sins, Bultmann concludes,

> Mk. 2:5b-10 has manifestly been given its place because the Church wanted to trace back to Jesus its own right to forgive sins. And indeed the language shows, and the analogies in Matt. 16:19, 18:18 prove, that the Palestinian Church demonstrates by her possession of healing power that she has the right to forgive sins. In this way she traced her authority back to an original action of Jesus to which further analogies were added immediately.[26]

What the reader is given access to, is not primarly an event in Jesus' life, but a situation in which 'is expressed the conviction that the authority of Jesus to forgive sins has become the possession of the Church'.[27]

The Healing of a Man with a Withered Hand

On Mk. 3:1-6, Bultmann's comments are brief. This Sabbath healing of the man with a withered hand is an 'organically complete apophthegm'.[28] Its formulation took place in the early Palestinian Church. The 'logion' in v. 4, 'Is it lawful on the Sabbath to do good or to do harm . . .?' cannot be maintained to have been an originally isolated unit of tradition. The entire exchange belongs together, from its original formulation.

Both Mk. 3:1-6 and 2:1-12 have a distinctive saying or pronouncement of Jesus, set amid Jesus' miraculous activity. But, the passages differ in style. This shorter account of healing in the Synagogue on the Sabbath lacks the complete form of the miracle story, as do other, similar examples.

> These passages are not told in the style of miracle stories, for the miracle has been completely subordinated to the point of the apophthegm.[29]

Neither of these two stories asks us to accept testimony for miracles which occurred at a particular time and place in Jesus' life. Here, the completed miracle stories are composite structures consisting of a saying of Jesus, significant in a setting of the early Church, set into motifs and themes comprising the miracle story. The apparent details and sequences encountered are not eye-witness detail, or transcribings of literal reminiscence. There is a definite and consistent attribution of them to features of the genre of miracle story[30] and to dismiss any attempt to specify particular remembered incidents with accurate detail: - as, for example, the belief that on one occasion some people really did bring a sick man to Jesus and used the extraordinary expedient of coming through the roof. In this sense, where miracle is concerned, Bultmann is an

historical sceptic. The first obligation is to recognize that 'miracle stories have their own history in the tradition'.[31] This dissolves the force of the older question, Did Jesus do this or that miracle? - while admittedly, at the same time, answering it in the negative.

Restoring the Dead (and the Healing of the Woman with an Issue of Blood)

We have to lead into the raising of Jairus' daughter (Mk. 5:21-24, 35-43) by referring to this additional miracle because of the way they are now inseparable in the text. It is apparent from the internal chronology of the linked stories that the healing of the woman (5:25-34) occasions the delay, during which the child actually dies.

Bultmann maintains that the interweaving and the delay belong to the level of the narrative only. We do not have, as it were, an account of an actual day's activity, though he does say that features in the stories bring them into 'closer relationship to the "life of Jesus".'

> I have no doubt that we are here dealing with what was originally two miracle stories, and the motive for joining them seems quite clear to me; the interval between the father's statement ἐσχάτως ἔχει in v. 23 and the crowd's news in v. 35 'ἀπέθανεν' should be taken as a more or less considerable space of time.[32]

Bultmann believes the two stories to have been woven together at a prior stage in the tradition and not by Mark himself.

> The weaving together of two miracle stories, which seem to have been already available to Mark, is unique. Similarly it would seem that the editorial link with the preceding passage in v. 21 did not originate with Mark.[33]

From the modicum of the permissibly miraculous that Bultmann allows Jesus really to have done, the healing of this woman need not be regarded as an inconceivable event. But it is not Bultmann's purpose to approach the story in this way. Rather, he treats all details in the story as 'typical', exhibiting the norms of healing stories themselves rather than details of a specific occasion. It is treated as a collection of motifs and themes in a consistent story-form, which here has become attached[34] to Jesus. Thus, 'details' depicting one incident are not specifically historical, recollections, but typical. All the following details are typical:

1. a flow of blood for twelve years v. 25[35]
2. the emphasis on the fruitless treatment by the doctors, v. 26, which emphasizes the seriousness of the complaint.[36]

3. Typical too, is the specially developed motif of physical contact vv. 27-32.[37]

4. The instantaneousness of the cure.

The Raising of Jairus' Daughter

If we had wanted to ascribe the healing of the woman to historical reminiscence, because we felt there was nothing necessarily too miraculous in some conceptions of her healing, this quasi-naturalistic hypothesis collapses with this account of the dead girl being restored to life. Unless of course, one embarks on the stultifying path of responding in a naturalistic manner to all Jesus' miracles - an activity rendered invalid since 1835. Here, we unquestionably enter the realm of miracle proper, and as Strauss made the point so well, the ears of the dead cannot simply hear the command to arise, as if they were after all alive! *

One has to include in any response to this story and its equivalents, beliefs about the wider issues of what God can and might do, about what prayer, and in particular, the prayer of particular individuals might achieve, and how God might act in and through a person so that the resulting act was both the act of the man and the act of God. Bultmann, as we shall see, maintains that a literal restoration of a dead person, simply by command, is an event outside the bounds of historical possibility, and not to be countenanced. In fact, the question of history, of this account describing an incident in which Jesus did basically as depicted, is answered by an appeal to general motifs appropriate to the miraculous story genre. The recovery of any kind of literal history resembling this narrative is unwarranted.

The interweaving of the stories accounts for the fact that Jesus is summoned to heal but arrives to raise the dead. This exhibits 'the typical motif of heightening the effect by emphasizing the greatness of the task (cp. esp. v. 35) as does the laughter of the mourning crowd vv. 38-40a'.[38] Other story-details are also typical.

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* I do not think it necessary to be overconcerned with any suggestion that the souls of the dead are still nearby, and they simply hear and obey the human word. The four days of Lazarus rule this out. As noted when discussing Strauss, the calming of the storm is similar in this respect, where there is no human agent to respond to the command.

-the dismissal of the crowd vv. 38-40a
-the healing gesture and the magic word v. 41
-the instantaneousness of miracle v. 42
-the statement of the girl's age.
-the request that she be fed - which demonstrates the reality of her return to this life and that she is not a ghost. It is not a piece of medical advice or even a homely gesture of kindness and common sense.

Even the name 'Jairus' is regarded as secondary, a later detail added to the story in its transmission. Bultmann gives as his reason for saying this, that 'the name is not to be found in D and is lacking in Matthew'.[39] Indeed, of Mk. 10:46-52, he writes, 'This story shows its secondary character in giving the name of the blind man.'

I want to question the claim that the laughter of the crowd is an example of the typical motif of 'heightening the effect by emphasizing the greatness of the task'.

The mourners, it seems to me, do not laugh at Jesus because of any expectation that the dead girl is going to be raised. They are not as it were mocking powers which are soon to be vindicated to their amazement. I am not saying, either, that after all, the girl was not really dead. If we look carefully at the story, we find that the crowd laugh at Jesus <u>because he told them that the girl was not dead</u>. They laugh, not because he is going to overwhelm them with impossible power, but because he has denied at the most basic level what their senses have convinced them of - that she is lying there in front of them all, dead. They laugh because he has said something ridiculous, not because a miracle has been presaged. If anything, Jesus' statement here in the narrative, has the effect of <u>reducing</u> the sense of miracle-about-to-take-place at which sceptics might laugh. The reader, all along, shares the information that Mark has given us, that the girl is in fact dead.

If the laughter exhibits a motif, it is that of privacy or secrecy. Jesus camouflages his action, not by taking the dead girl aside, nor simply by sending the crowd away, but by telling the mourners as they are sent away that the child is not dead, and that hence, <u>no miracle need take place</u>. I do not think that Bultmann includes in his comprehensive list of miracle story motifs, one which covers the giving of mis-information to the crowd. The statement is associated with the withdrawal of the crowd (a miracle story motif, <u>History</u>, p. 224) and might have some connection with Jesus preserving an element of secrecy, or else, the motif that 'it was not fitting to see the Godhead at his work'.

No simple application of these motifs will do, however, since it is obviously considered fitting for disciples and family not to be excluded. More importantly, if Jesus misinforms the mourners as part of a secrecy or hiddenness-of-activity motif, this would affect our response to Jesus commanding them in v. 43 that 'no one should know of this'. Bultmann concludes of this verse that it does not fit the context since a resuscitation could not be hidden, and hence derives this verse from Mark (History, p. 214). If however, they had laughed at Jesus for the quite plausible reason that I have suggested, then the credibility of the witnesses not telling anyone has been built in from the beginning. Since Jesus has told everyone, and in particular the mourners, that the girl is not in fact dead, then any subsequent appearance of the girl could only confirm what he had told them - that she had been after all, only asleep. Jesus commands them not to correct their apprehension.

G. Theissen repeats the belief that the mourners' laughter expresses scepticism and mockery.

> Even when a person suspects the possibility of a miracle, he remains sceptical. The mourners laugh at Jesus (Mk. 5:40).[40]

I do not think Mark presents the mourners as laughing for that reason.

Bultmann has said that 'Talitha cumi' functions as a magic-word here. Thus,

> The miracle working word is frequently given in strange, incomprehensible sounds, or alternatively handed down in some foreign language.[41]

While Mark does give the command in a tongue foreign to the story, he does not leave the audience surrounded by the incomprehensibility of the foreign word, but immediately gives its translated equivalent where it appears as a simple command, which, when addressed to a sleeping child, would be understood as such. And the command is not foreign to the speaker in question, which we might expect it to be if Mark were portraying Jesus as one who healed by the use of strange words of command which none but an adept about him might dare to learn. That the healing, restorative word in Mark does in fact have a potentially magical interpretation is supported by the observation that Matthew, in a number of places where the miracle-working word is given in Mark, omits them altogether. Hull writes,

> Matthew generally omits or rewrites the 'word of power' which is associated with the Markan miracles. No word of power is reported at Matt. 8:26, 29ff; 9:25; 17:18; 20:34. A word of power or at least a saying exists in all the Marcan parallels. It is especially noteworthy that all the Aramaic words are omitted in spite of the fact that Matthew's gospel,

> if addressed to Jews in Syria, would have been a more natural place for these words than Mark's gospel.[42]

Thus, Matthew's elimination of the 'Talitha cumi' supports the belief that it would be understood as a magic word in some contexts. I would still want to say that the matter is more complex than this. To penetrate to the heart of the matter, one has to attend to the issues raised by Strauss. What can anyone make of a human command that has an effect on the dead, whose organs of audition and rational functions have ceased? The question about 'magic', or more generally, the source and identity of the power involved, would emerge when any reader or hearer of the story in Mark began to ask 'How can two words which mean 'Little girl, get up', have the effect that is indicated?' The possibility of magical, potent words would be one response, and a response that Matthew would not be happy with. But the effectiveness of Jesus' word in Mark need not be understood as being confined to that outlook, nor as deriving from it. Hull often refers to the problem of formally distinguishing between miracle and magic. The conservative Lewis often made the observation that miracles are in some respects quite magical.

If we introduced the possibility that God could empower particular people to raise the dead, and that Jesus really addressed the girl in this way, the fact that the effect far outweighs the statement in its merely rational aspect and capacities could lend itself to something like a magical response to the words. It would raise the possibility for some, that the power lay in the words themselves, which anyone might then dare to utter.

The Widow of Nain's Son

Bultmann's principal claim is that this story (Lk. 7:11-17) is an application to Jesus of a recognizable type of Hellenistic resuscitation story.[43] It exhibits the same typical feature of the miracle-worker meeting the coffin.[44] He is not claiming that we can identify a particular miracle story and say that Luke is dependent on that as a source. Rather, this story realizes itself, as it were; is available to be attached to a number of figures at different times and places.[45] As an example of this kind of dependence, the exhibition of similar themes and motifs as against a specific copying process, we can refer to F. W. Beare on sea-wonders in Mark and Vergil. 'It is not necessary to ask if Mark had read Vergil; it would suggest rather that Vergil and Mark were here following a pattern of sea wonders.'[46]

Here, in the Nain story, almost all significant features are typical; realizations of motifs inherent or potential to the tale. In this way are accounted for, the accompanying crowd, that the mother is a widow, and the impression reported to have been made. In all, it is more 'probable that there was an Hellenistic Jewish-Christian origin for this formulation which certainly seems to be rather secondary'.[47]

Bultmann's 'probable' conclusion draws support from wider considerations, some of which were clearly formulated by Strauss. In the first place, there are the basic considerations about the kind of event itself. In addition, it is odd that Mark and Matthew do not refer to the event, or give it precedence over the Jairus story - a lesser miracle. If, all along, we are dealing with anything like accurately remembered events in a recoverable history, the solitary appearance of this great miracle remains puzzling, which objection is magnified when we turn to the Lazarus miracle. The Nain miracle also raises problems for any promotion of the view that an actual occasion is being described, by virtue of the impact one would reasonably expect this and similar events to have on the twelve, particularly as a didactic base for Jesus teaching them about his own power over death, and his forthcoming Resurrection.

It seems that we are faced with the need to make a mixed response to Jesus' miracles at this point. While one might have wanted to develop a defence of the historicity of the Jairus incident, because of its more uniform presence in the tradition, its containing what could be made out as convincing and likely detail, its internal consistency, the short duration of the death, most of these principles seem to break down at this further miracle, and be inapplicable. Any public miracle of magnitude before Jesus' death raises the precise problem of throwing too much light on the one who is going to be raised, but whose Resurrection the disciples are never able to anticipate.

When these kinds of miracle are combined with explicit reference by Jesus to his own Resurrection, they exhibit the presumption that the disciples, if half-reasonable men, would have been prepared for and expecting the events of the first Easter Sunday.

Bultmann's claim is that it is more likely that the story in Luke does not refer to what Jesus did in the town of Nain on one particular day, but that it realizes motifs of a raising story that could also be realized in other ways. Bultmann's theory also

gains strength by being able to account for the real differences that exist from Gospel to Gospel, and to dissolve the problems raised by transferring pericopes from the different Gospels into a hoped for non-problematical history, full of the greatest wonders. And that is a good note on which to transfer the discussion to the Raising of Lazarus, which as a literal event in the life of Jesus, combined with Jesus' teaching on Resurrection, should have had the disciples waiting for Him outside the tomb at Easter.

The Raising of Lazarus

As we saw, Bultmann interprets the tradition of the appearances of the Risen Jesus to the disciples as somewhat of a concession to their weakness, as something that they should not have needed. So here, he maintains that John has his own critique of this miracle that he has drawn from the tradition, from a semeia source. This raising of Lazarus (John 11:1-54) has two functions: First, it is a symbol for the saying in v. 25 'I am the resurrection and the life' and, it 'provides an antitype to 11:17-27: a description is given of those who need the external miracle in order to recognize Jesus as Revealer'.[48] He allows that the Evangelist must, and has to some extent defeated his own purposes by in fact narrating the outward miracle.

> The Johannine technique of misunderstanding is plain, but its execution is unclear, because of the way the Evangelist has bound himself to the miracle story. For basically the primitive concept of ἀνάστασις is not corrected by the fact that instead of declaring the eschatological ἀνάστασις of popular thought, Jesus by his miraculous power brings about an immediate ἀναστῆναι of Lazarus, but as vv. 25ff show, by the fact that the idea of the eschatological ἀνάστασις is so transformed that the future resurrection of Martha's belief becomes irrelevant in the face of the present resurrection that faith grasps.[49]

John's emphasis is said to be on the present Resurrection that faith grasps, which is neither the end-anastasis nor the immediate miracle. Bultmann is saying that at best, the immediate miracle included by John here, is a symbol of this 'Resurrection' in the present that is grasped by faith, but which is neither the literal miracle nor the wonder of the end-day. Hence, John introduces a term that symbolizes this reality which is neither the simple miracle nor the general Resurrection. He uses the term ζωή or 'life'. So, the question of Jesus to Martha, 'Do you believe this?' - that Jesus is the Resurrection and the life is asking 'whether a man is ready to let life and death as he knows them to be unreal'. But

> Any representation of the 'what' and 'how' of the promised ζωή could only speak of human possibilities, and the highest of these would not be better than the most primitive in comparison with the promised ζωή which as eschatological reality . . . stands beyond human possibilities.[50]

The Lazarus miracle is a sign of this greater reality which is beyond our capacity to describe except in terms of the symbol ζωή. As an apparent miracle in history, it stands under the injunction against this kind of event, and in fact the details of the miracle, as in the others, emerge from typical motifs. That the town is identified (Bethany) is a common secondary feature,[51] as is the identification of Mary and Martha as sisters. That Mary is the one who anointed Jesus (Mk. 14:3-9) 'is a gloss of the ecclesiastical redactor' and 'corresponds to a tendency to link data given in the tradition to a world known to the reader'. The sisters were probably unnamed in the original. In the original story, Lazarus having been in the grave three days would have been there as a typical feature to enhance the scale of the deed done. John himself, or better, the Evangelist, is not interested in this as such, since for him, the miracle has become a symbol.

Bultmann's response to miracle here gains in probability as it responds to the notable omissions of this and the Cana miracle from the Synoptics, again issues spelled out clearly by Strauss (and noted by Newman) all those years before. These are issues which, it seems to me, the theistic capacities of allowing miracles into the literal life of Jesus can only respond to with some difficulty.

Given their occurrence in a pragmatic history, Mark's omission, Matthew's omission, and Luke's omission become serious oversights and shortcomings as does their failure to put forward the event as the cause of Jesus' death (John 11:46-50). It might therefore be appropriate to conclude with Bultmann's estimation of historical intention on the part of the fourth Evangelist. Here, his remarks are addressed to another miracle that is only found in John, the wine-miracle at Cana. He writes,

> <u>For the Evangelist</u> the meaning of the story is not contained simply in the miraculous event. This, or

rather the narrative is the symbol* of something which occurs throughout the whole of Jesus' ministry. . . . The question whether the Evangelist believed the miracle to have been an actual historical occurrence may not, it seems to me, be answered so obviously in the affirmative as usually happens.[52]

Jesus' Miracles
General

From our survey of Jesus' miracles as interpreted by Bultmann, it seems that our conclusions about what he actually did are going to be quite different from any simple correspondence with the sum of miracle stories, and any historical intention that they contain. The connection between Jesus' miracles and history is not going to be made at the level of occurrence.

> Yet it would not be right to consider the gospel miracle stories in the bounds of the New Testament only. The less the miracle stories as such are truly historical reports the more we need to ask how they have found their way into the Gospel tradition. And even if some historical events underlie some miracles of healing, it is still true that their narrative form has been the work of the Tradition. And even if the motifs have grown up spontaneously in the early church, there would be both central and peripheral motifs taken over from popular and perhaps literary miracle stories. That is clear, as far as the peripheral motifs are concerned, from the parallels to the Synoptic miracle stories.[53]

In something of a rapid survey, we can extend the presentation of Bultmann's interpretation of the Gospel miracles.

Stories of demon-exorcism had a special place in establishing Jesus' messiaship, and appear in summaries and in different stories not traceable to any one underlying story. Other kinds of story often display variants of what is undoubtedly one story. For example,

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* Symbol is an important subject in its own right in the study of miracle in the New Testament. Both Gerd Theissen and Howard Kee refer extensively to symbol in their recent studies on miracle. Both refer to work by S. K. Langer on the theory of symbol and its place in ordering human existence and experience (S. K. Langer, Philosophy in a New Key, Cambridge, Mass., (1942), 1976). Theissen writes, 'Miracle stories . . . are symbolic actions of human subjectivity in which a revelation of the holy is given shape and 'empirical reality transcended'. (The Miracle Stories of the Early Christian Tradition, p. 35.) He refers to a multi-stream tradition in which the sense of symbol and symbolic action has been formed, including Cassirer, Freud, Jung and Gadamer. Kee devotes a chapter to 'Miracle as Universal Symbol' where the discussion of symbolic intention in John is significant. (Miracle in the Early Christian World, pp. 221-41.)

the deaf-mute and the blind man of Mark 7:31-37 and 8:22-26, are clear variants. The latter is 'in all probability to be taken as a variant'.[54] The story of the ten lepers Luke 17:11-19 is 'admittedly secondary, and Hellenistic in origin, depending on the miracle story in Mark 1:40-45.'[55] The two feeding stories in Mark are variants.[56]

With respect to taking over central and peripheral motifs from popular miracle stories - 'transferring some available miracle story to a hero', independent support for this kind of process is found in the work of J. R. R. Tolkien on fairy stories.[57]

The process of attributing great deeds to Jesus is not thereby made into a mechanical or copyist activity for which we can provide the exact source or even story. Bultmann, in addition, stresses that one source which we might naturally presume to be significant, the Old Testament, has in fact, only a small part in this process. Here, as we have noted, he differs somewhat from Strauss.

> The Old Testament used to be thought of very highly as a source of the gospel miracle stories. The Rabbinic thesis of Moses as the type of the Messiah . . . would have led the Church to deck out the story of Jesus with miraculous features from the story of Moses. There is actually little evidence of that; there is something of the sort in the story of the Transfiguration, but that is hardly a miracle story in the strict sense. It is highly improbable that the feeding stories have arisen out of the story of the Manna in Exod. 16.[58]

I do not find Bultmann's claim convincing at this point. In the above passage, he plays down the formative value of the thesis of Moses as a type of the Messiah. He then goes on to say that 'the expectation that the Messiah would work miracles . . . (and) show them very many wonders . . . has certainly contributed to the practice already in the Palestinian Church of telling stories about the miracles of Jesus'.[59] His objection seems to be directed at the theory of Moses as the type of the Messiah, and if a wider connection between Moses and Jesus could be suggested, then it would seem reasonable to expect some kind of connection between their wonders. The theme of exodus might turn out to be applicable to both, and as the exodus of Israel from Egypt was accomplished with wonders and hardness of heart, so might the exodus of Israel out of herself, in Jesus, be accompanied by miracles of equal magnitude and mixed effect. Overall, Bultmann places little emphasis on the Old Testament as a source of Jesus' miracles.

> But the less probable it is that we can take the transference of miracle stories to Jesus to be a literary process, the less

the Old Testament can occupy our attention as a source.[60]

Bultmann allows that the suggestions of Easter stories being carried back into the earlier ministry, and of miracle stories being fashioned from dominical sayings, are correct for some examples. He says that this obtains for the stories of the Miraculous Draught of Fishes in John 21:1-14 and Luke 5:1-11, but is doubtful if the same holds for the Stilling of the Storm and the Walking on the Water. A saying about fishers of men probably lies at back of one of the miraculous catches, and a parable at back of the Withering of the Fig Tree.[61]

> It is more probable that folk stories of miracles and miracle motifs have come into the oral tradition, a process which is quite plain in Mark 5:1-21.[62]

and

> But in any case the Hellenistic miracle stories offer such a wealth of parallels to the Synoptic, particularly in style, as to create a prejudice in favour of supposing that the Synoptic miracle stories grew up on Hellenistic ground.[63]

The distinction between Hellenistic miracle material and a Jesus who did not actually do the miracles, has developed into a major issue in New Testament Studies, particularly in the study of Mark. The issue comes down to the distinction between Jesus as eschatological preacher of repentance with a modicum of appropriate healing and exorcism, and Jesus as a θεῖος ἄνθρωπος or θεῖος ἀνήρ fully empowered to work the most amazing wonders. The distinction has not met with universal acceptance.[64] In conclusion, we can say that in his response to the Gospel miracles, Bultmann stresses the human, imaginative, creative process by which the early church borrowed, adapted and created miracle themes, and attached them to the central figure of their faith.

The Impossibility of Literal Miracle
The Significance for Faith

While we can presume that in most cases the Evangelists possessed an historical intention in narrating Jesus' miracles, we have seen how Bultmann qualifies this in the case of John. More significantly, in his systematic response to miracle, a general qualification is placed on any and every historical intention concerning miracle. That is, even granted that the Evangelists believed Jesus to have done these deeds, their intention runs up against what Bultmann knows to be the limits of historical possibility. Their intentions do not meet with historical reality, and they put

forward as literal events, items which, Bultmann is certain, could never have happened.

This clearly implies that the present reality of faith as pursued by a Christian accommodates erroneous thinking, if, as part of its reality, it posits a basis for itself in the sum of literal wonders done by Jesus, in the central, modal miracle of Incarnation, or in a miraculous Resurrection. Having already outlined his interpretation of Gospel miracle stories, we can appreciate the scope of the following claim -

> Even if all of them were historically verified . . . it is still true that as deeds of a man in the past they do not directly concern us. Seen as such they are not works of the Christ, if we understand by the work of Christ the work of redemption.
>
> Therefore, in any discussion, the 'wonders of Jesus' are entirely open to critical investigation. It should be most strongly emphasized that Christian faith is not concerned with proving the possibility or the actuality of the wonders of Jesus as events of the past. On the contrary, such concern would be wrong.[65] (Italics mine)

The revelatory focus is always drawn forward into the inquirers' present, and is not constituted in part by the memory or survival of literal miracles once done by Jesus. What is recovered by historical research does not constitute a pre-requisite, or a basis for the present reality of faith.

> When the revelation is truly understood as God's revelation, it is no longer a communication of teachings, nor of ethical, or historical and philosophical truths, but God speaking directly to me, assigning me each time to the place that is allotted me before God, i.e., summoning me in my humanity, which is null without God, and which is open to God only in the recognition of its nullity. Hence, there is only one 'criterion' for the truth of revelation, namely, this, that the word which claims to be the revelation must place each man before a decision - the decision as to how he wants to understand himself: as one who wants his life and authenticity by his own resources and actions, or by the grace of God.[66]

Bultmann goes further than this in re-valuing the central miracle of the Christian faith and shifting its locus from the specificity of the past. Where Strauss, in a Hegelian manner, sought to revive Incarnation by applying it to the human race in its entire historical progress, we find Bultmann giving it an altogether different sense for faith in the present.

> What matters is that the incarnation should not be conceived of as a miracle that happened about 1950 years ago, but as an eschatalogical happening, which, beginning with Jesus, is always present in the words of men proclaiming it to be a human experience. . . . Thus the revelation has to be an event, which occurs whenever and wherever the word of grace

> is spoken to a man. The 'Demythologized' sense of the Christian doctrine of incarnation . . . is precisely this, that God manifests himself not merely as the idea of God . . . but as 'My' God, who speaks to me here and now, through a human mouth.[67]

The miracles are not then, a collection of historically-sure events set between miracles of origin and end, and emerging from the rather more hidden, yet equally miraculous reality of the union between God and this man.

We can see then, that for Bultmann, the weight is always placed upon the conditions of man's present existence, and this subjective element cannot be bypassed, whether referring to God or His actions in the allegedly miraculous.

> In any case, talking of God, <u>if</u> it were possible, would necessarily be talking at the same time of ourselves. Therefore the truth holds that when the question is raised of how any speaking of God can be possible, the answer must be, it is only possible as talk of ourselves.[68]

And once more,

> The assertion of God's omnipotence is thus no universally valid proposition to be applied at will, which may be presupposed as a starting point for a world view. Rather, it affirms first and always that God, the determining Power governing my individual life, can be rightly called omnipotent only if I experience this power in my own life . . . if He reveals to <u>me</u> His omnipotence. But <u>this</u> revelation is always a miracle . . . an act of the divine will which is wholly outside my control.[69] (Italics mine)

The significance of the capacity for faith to bypass the specific past-events of Jesus' miracles, particularly an historical event of Resurrection,[70] lies in the fact that purely secular accounts of human existence seem to account for all that is needed for authentic life to be formulated and encountered, and faith itself becomes 'not a mysterious supernatural quality, but the disposition of genuine humanity'.[71]

> But in the Christian conception, faith is not 'weakened' by the denial that historical objectification is absolutely and universally valid, i.e., by the denial that 'faith can find objective guarantees in the world'. On the contrary, it is only when there is no such objective guarantee, that faith acquires meaning and strength, for only then is it authentic decision.[72]

'Faith can testify . . . never to something else because of which it believes.'[73]

In this way, an historical-miraculous Jesus is substantially bypassed. I remain uncertain as to whether this is due simply to the impossibility of these events as such, or because of a prior certainty about the structure of faith which Bultmann would prefer

even if the 'foundational' miracles of Christianity did take place.

> An historical fact which involves a resurrection from the dead is utterly inconceivable!
>
> Yes indeed: the resurrection of Jesus cannot be a miraculous proof by which the sceptic might be compelled to believe in Christ. The difficulty is not simply the incredibility of a mythical event like the resuscitation of a dead person - for that is what the resurrection means, as is shown by the fact that the risen Lord is apprehended by the physical senses. Nor is it merely the impossibility of establishing the objective historicity of the resurrection no matter how many witnesses are cited, as though once it was established it might be believed beyond all question and faith might have its unimpeachable guarantee. No; the real difficulty is that the resurrection is itself an article of faith, and you cannot establish one article of faith by invoking another.[74]

The intricacy and reality of the connection between this understanding of faith in its theological and philosophical setting, and the interpretation of the miraculous in the New Testament is at once apparent. Bultmann himself acknowledges that 'the resurrection of Jesus is often used in the New Testament as a miraculous proof'.[75] He refers to examples in Acts, to Paul's use of the list of eye-witnesses, and to the narratives of the empty tomb and the appearances at the end of the Gospels. We can conclude then, that Bultmann's comprehension of faith, and his belief that the miraculous cannot be historical at this point has to revalue substantially an acknowledged intention of the primary, literary records of the Christian religion.

With reference to his belief that the miraculous cannot be historical, the significant issue for an inquirer into the miraculous dimension in Christianity, concentrating on the tradition of response to miracle, is that Bultmann appears as an antithesis of the tradition represented by Aquinas, Newman and Lewis, who yet claims to offer a true understanding of Christian faith. While attacking belief in literal miracles with greater attention to specific cases than even Hume, he stands as a defender of faith, not as a sceptic nor opponent to Christianity. However valid this might turn out to be, it is on first sight, confusing. For it is without question that if you stripped the miraculous, in its historical reality, from the former three, <u>they</u> would not have maintained that there was anything left to what was specifically Christian in the Christian Religion. We can, at least, be perfectly clear as to the theological and philosophical differences, even contradictions, holding between Bultmann, and Aquinas, Newman and Lewis on the subject of miracle. Bultmann writes,

> A wonder is an amazing event contrary to nature (contra naturam) - 'nature' connoting the regular orderly sequence of natural events. . . . The idea of wonder as miracle has become almost impossible for us to-day because we understand the processes of nature as governed by law. Wonder, as miracle, is therefore a violation of the conformity to law which governs all nature, and for us to-day this idea is no longer tenable. It is untenable, not because such an event would contradict all experience, but because the conformity to law which is a part of our conception of nature does not require proof but is presupposed as axiomatic, and because we cannot free ourselves from that presupposition at will.[76]

And again,

> All decisions and all deeds have their causes and consequences; and the historical method presupposes that it is possible in principle to exhibit these and their connection and thus to understand the whole historical process as a closed unity.
>
> This closedness means that the continuum of historical happenings cannot be rent by the interference of supernatural, transcendent powers and that therefore, there is no 'miracle' in this sense of the word. Such a miracle would be an event whose cause did not lie within history.[77]

We have already seen how this foundational and apparently absolute claim was readily absorbed by Aquinas' accommodation of literal miracle. For Bultmann, however, within historical inquiry, <u>all</u> events will be understood 'in terms of that event's imminent historical causes,'[78] and a miracle, or Resurrection of a body remains 'utterly inconceivable'.[79]

Bultmann says some important things about our responses to demons and spirits that figure in some Gospel miracle stories. In responding to his comments, we should banish that sense of restrained caution found in the modern orthodox, with their stress on theoretical possibility that such creatures might exist, that our knowledge of higher realms is limited, or, that since our knowledge of the relation of soul and body or mind and body is limited, there may after all be disembodied creatures of a malignant kind. This restrained and somewhat dignified belief is already a marked departure from the full-blooded, ancient picture of the world as literally inhabited by these creatures. In this sense, Bultmann is unobjectionably correct to say,

> It is impossible to use electric light and the wireless and to avail ourselves of modern medical and surgical discoveries; and at the same time to believe in the New Testament world of spirits and miracles. We may think we can manage it in our own lives, but to expect others to do so is to make the Christian faith unintelligible and unacceptable to the modern world.[80]

Even the conservatives who appear to make room for a literal devil and devils are quite far from the outlook of the Gospels.*

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*On the decline in our culture of the New Testament world of demons and spirits, Bultmann refers to Schutz' work on the decay of mythical religion in the East through the introduction of modern hygiene and medicine.

Perhaps a good example to take is the modern response to epilepsy and to brain disorders. In the New Testament there are indications of the belief that epilepsy was due to possession by an unclean spirit, as seen in the story of the boy whom Jesus' disciples were unable to heal, Mk. 9:14-28 par. (Hull, Hellenistic Magic and The Synoptic Tradition, comments on Matthew's greatly reduced emphasis on the demonic here (pp. 132-3)). But even in the 4th century, Martin still responded to epileptics as to the possessed, (Stancliffe, St. Martin and His Hagiographer, p. 252). Keller, (Miracles in Dispute, p. 43) cites the following event from Reimarus' time. 'A woman showed in their acutest form all the signs of being possessed by the devil. Exorcism, preaching and the application of holy water, etc. brought no improvement. The doctors of the town intervened and ordered the use of such gentle measures as the mediaeval science of the time allowed. None the less, in the end the patient died. An official autopsy, in the presence of fifteen doctors and a notary, showed that the woman so possessed had suffered from chronic encephalitis and had apparently died as a result of the disease.' Lewis, on the other hand, wants to 'sternly discourage the pseudo-science of demonology' while maintaining that there are 'enemy-spies' amongst us - though precisely where he will not commit himself. (Miracles, p. 125). Again, this only serves to support Bultmann's claim concerning the unbridgeable gulf between the New Testament unclean spirits, and the rationalized devils of to-day. See also the article 'Demonology', K. Rahner, Encyclopedia of Theology: A Concise Sacramentum Mundi, p. 334. Also, Terence Ranger, 'Medical Science and Pentecost: The Dilemma of Anglicanism in Africa' in The Church and Healing, Edited by W. J. Sheils (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1982), pp. 333-66. H. van der Loos (The Miracles of Jesus, pp. 209-10), writes,

'When Jesus drives out evil spirits, he breaks the power of Satan. . . . The material conception of that power, viz., that it manifests itself in the appearance of independent, malignant spirits, is secondary. These figures, in their material representation, were terrible realities for the people of those days. Here too the issue is not whether Jesus did not know that this was a material representation. In His healings of the mentally sick, Jesus smashed the reality of Satan's power by attacking it in the material conception which people of that time had of it . . . The coming of the Kingdom means the unmasking of all powers of the Prince of Darkness . . . and the healing of the mentally deranged and other sick persons is just as much a part of this as the teaching of the disciples . . . the seriousness and the most violent nature of mental disease will too often create the impression of a diabolical "extra".' (Italics mine)

The significant point is not whether Van der Loos has adopted the correct account of the connection between mental illness and the interpretation of possession by unclean spirits. The significant point is the extent to which he is in fact saying the same thing as Bultmann about the differences between the New Testament world of demons and our own world. I am sure that Bultmann would be happy to speak of Satan as a 'material conception' of evil, useful even as a material conception even to-day - as long as you filled in its substance correctly.

In a statement that sums up his consistent approach to miracle, which will still appear strange to those with a different outlook on the Gospels, Bultmann writes,

> The idea of miracle has, therefore, become untenable and it must be abandoned. But its abandonment is also required because, in itself, it is not a notion of faith but a purely intellectual notion . . . Hence the Christian faith is apparently not concerned with miracles; rather it has cause to exclude the idea of miracle. No argument to the contrary can be based on the fact that in the Bible events are certainly recorded which must be called miracles. . . . the biblical writers, in accordance with the presupposition of their thinking had not fully appreciated the idea of miracle and its implications. The authority of scripture is not abandoned when the idea of miracle is relinquished. The real meaning of Scripture can be rightly seen only after the idea of wonder as God's action has been made clear.[81]

Finally, the revaluation of Incarnation is completed where he writes,

> Continually the stumbling-block of the 'was made flesh' must be overcome. Anyone who chooses to affirm God's revelation in the historical personality of Jesus lays himself open to Kierkegaard's taunt that he is smarter than God himself, who sent his Son in the hiddenness of the flesh. To apply the conception of revelation to the historically demonstrable personality of Jesus is as senseless as to apply the conception of creation and wonder to the world seen as nature.[82]

Certainly, Newman was clearly, and in all seriousness, attempting to do just that. If (as I have been persuaded to do in the course of my research), we reduce the level of Jesus' actual, historical, miraculous activity by a substantial amount, then we are bound to pay closer attention to resolutions of Christian faith that attempt to bypass dependence on the belief that these greatest of miracles took place (pp. 207ff.). Amongst these resolutions of faith, Bultmann's understanding of faith remains as one option. This is so, even if we do not agree with his axiomatic rejection of miracle (p. 210) which reiterates Straussian themes (p. 160), but reach our conclusions even while consciously trying to remain open to the possibility that Jesus could have walked on the water, fed the multitudes or raised Lazarus from the dead.

CHAPTER VIII

CAN WE MAKE SENSE OF MARK BY BELIEVING THAT JESUS' MIRACLES HAPPENED?

An Initial Question

I want to restrict my attention to Mark and consider it as an internally consistent narrative that is partly formed by accounts of Jesus' miracles. I want to see what contribution to the subject of miracles, and belief in their occurrence, Mark itself makes. Perhaps a better way of phrasing the title question would be: Does Mark itself present any distinctive obstacles for the belief that Jesus' miracles took place?

Compared with the maximal resolutions of miracle that we have examined, Mark appears as substantially incomplete. It omits all reference to Jesus' miraculous origin, and it contains no sense of a union between God and man that exists from this moment of conception. The end-miracle of Resurrection is recounted in a singularly minimal fashion, compared with the accounts of Jesus' appearances given in the other Gospels.[1] The state of the Risen Jesus is left to be inferred or imagined from the pre-conditions of the empty tomb and the message of the young man; unless we presume that Mark's community knows of more extensive appearance traditions to which Mark simply does not refer. Bultmann, as we have seen, did not believe that Mark originally ended at 16:8, but went on to a more extensive depiction of Resurrection appearances.

For those who identify the miracles of end and origin with Jesus as he actually began and ended his life, Mark must appear to be partial, even inadequate, because of what it leaves out. Perhaps more important will be the tendency to interpret Mark so as to conform to what we know of Jesus in these literal wonders from elsewhere. An obvious example of this procedure lies in the references to Mary, and to Jesus' brothers (3:31-35).

I want to approach Jesus' miracles in Mark by considering their effect on those closest to Jesus, the disciples. We might hope to find some indication of what effect the miracles had, and

whether they played a consistent, even cumulative role throughout Mark's account of the time that the disciples spent with Jesus. In these accounts the disciples are either mentioned as being present, taking part in the action, or can be presumed to be present from the context.

1. Four disciples at least can be presumed to be present at the expulsion of the unclean spirit from the man in the Capernaum Synagogue (1:21-28). They should hear the cry of the spirit as it identifies the one with power over it.

2. The same four, Simon, Andrew, James and John witness the healing of Simon's mother-in-law (1:29-31).

3. They witness a significantly greater application of Jesus' capacity to heal, and to expel unclean spirits (1:32-34). Mark tells us that <u>all</u> the sick and the possessed were brought to him, and that the whole city was gathered at the door. Whether this means ten, fifty, or even hundreds of people, we cannot tell. Although translations indicate that he healed <u>many</u> of the sick, interpreters conclude that the many are not to be contrasted with the <u>all</u> who come.[2] Jesus' power is not confined to some.

4. The disciples accompany Jesus throughout all Galilee (1:39), for which, preaching in the synagogues and casting out demons provides a concise summary of his activity. Jesus' power radiates from Capernaum, and not only that town benefits from his activity. The healing of the leper (1:40-44) is given as a particular example of this wider work. While the disciples are not mentioned in this account, the introductory setting where they are mentioned as accompanying him presumes their presence.

5. The same presumption holds for the healing of the paralytic whose sins were forgiven (2:1-12), and the Sabbath healing of the man with the withered hand (3:1-6).

6. Again, the disciples withdraw with Jesus to the sea, where a great multitude gathers and <u>many</u> are healed (3:7-12). The healing of the many creates a further 'crush' in which all the diseased press upon him to touch him (3:10). The unclean spirits identify Jesus as the Son of God as they fall before him. Jesus is emphatically portrayed as a source of power for healing which the crowd understand as accessible by mere touch or proximity. Of all this, the disciples are witnesses.

7. The disciples are the sole witnesses of the miracle of the calming of the storm. They see and hear Jesus rebuke the

wind and the sea, and the ensuing calm (4:31-35).*

8. They see the restoration of the Gerasene demoniac (5:1-20) so strong that chains and fetters cannot hold him, and possessed by more than one demon, under the name of Legion.[3] They see the two thousand swine go to their doom.

9. The disciples see the woman ill for twelve years cured by touching Jesus (5:24b-34). This is a specific example of healing by proximity to Jesus that figured in 3:10, where the crowd 'pressed upon him to touch him'.

10. Peter, James and John witness Jesus' restoration of Jairus' daughter, who is reported to be dead - and believed to be so by the mourners (5:21-24a, 35-43).

11. The disciples are with Jesus in his 'own country', presumably Nazareth (6:1-6). They see his healing of a few sick people, but are aware that Jesus is able to do no mighty work there, and of their unbelief.

12. The disciples are the principal participants in the first feeding miracle, following Jesus' teaching[4] of the great crowd

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* What is apparently a command addressed to natural elements might disclose a wider rationale. The terms rendered 'Peace! Be still!' or 'Be quiet! Be muzzled!' are similar to expressions used in explicit conflicts between demons and those seeking to exercise their authority over them. Hull, Hellenistic Magic and the Synoptic Tradition, pp. 68-9 refers to three aspects of the conflict: breaking the demon's silence, identifying the demon, and re-imposing silence before the demon gets control over the exorcist. On φιμόω(4:39), he cites S. Eitrem, Papyri Osloenses:I, Oslo 1925, p.77 for a background of demonic conflict behind Jesus' act of 'threatening the sea'. He seems to be saying that there is something of Jesus silencing a storm demon here. See also, H. C. Kee, Miracle in the Early Christian World, p.163. But whereas Mark clearly distinguishes between possessing spirit and person possessed (1:21-28, 3:11, 5:1-20), he does not do so here, referring directly only to wind and sea and not to an additional demonic element. Stancliffe, St. Martin and His Hagiographer, p.222, refers to intervening, protecting actions by Martin in the fourth century, where the assumption is 'that the weather is controlled not by impersonal forces such as air currents, but rather by spiritual beings operating them'. She refers (p.226) to Augustine, De diversis quaestionibus LXXXIII, where 'the way the "miracle" is actually performed is not "miraculous".' It is simply a question of God directing the lesser spirits, who perforce obey him . . . Augustine in his maturity portrayed what happened outwardly in this world as deriving from spiritual beings whom he generally called "potestates".' Thus, De div. quaest., quaest. 79, 1, 'Every visible thing in this world has an angelic power in charge of it.' It makes a difference to our response to the account whether we consider Jesus to be 'speaking to the wind', commanding a demon, or 'pulling rank' in a spiritual hierarchy.

on whom he had compassion, for 'they were like sheep without a shepherd' (6:30-44). Mark does not say anything that explicitly excludes the crowd from the knowledge of the action whereby the food is provided. Jesus merely commands the crowd to sit by companies, and then he takes the loaves and fish to be blessed, broken and distributed by the twelve (6:39-41). Unlike, for example, the raising of Jairus' daughter, there is no inner group who are drawn apart and see the miracle. Nor does he mention that they are all removed from the crowd while the act is done. The disciples have witnessed and participated in a miracle of the most amazing scale. From five loaves and two fish, the crowd of five thousand (men) is fed, and twelve baskets-full of pieces are collected.

13. The disciples are emphatically alone when they witness what turns out to be Jesus walking on the water (6:45-52). What they see, they at first take to be a ghost (6:49), seemingly, not a ghost-of-Jesus, but a spectre otherwise unknown to them, and generating fear and terror. Granted that they think they are seeing a ghost, why should they even connect it with Jesus? Has Jesus, from whom they have just departed following the feeding, suddenly died and become a spectre? When Jesus does eventually die, that is of course precisely what he does not become.

It seems that the disciples do not recognize what they see as having anything to do with Jesus until he alters his intention to pass them by, and addresses them with the words 'Take heart, it is I; have no fear', and gets into the boat with them. At this, too, the wind which had distressed them in their rowing dies away. Only from these identificatory acts do they realize that they have seen Jesus on the water.

The passage ends enigmatically with Mark attributing their astonishment to failure to understand about the loaves and to their hearts being hardened. It is not obvious from the passage whether their astonishment is that Jesus has walked on the water, or, that what they have seen on the water should turn out to be Jesus. Mark has already referred to their terror at the as yet unidentified ghost (v. 50). It is at least feasible that the subsequent reference to astonishment (v. 52) is at this turning out to be the flesh and blood Jesus, rather than to a general astonishment at encountering

anything at all walking on the sea.*

Whichever of these possibilities is preferred, the disciples have seen Jesus walk across the sea on which they sail - something quite out of the ordinary.

14. The disciples are present with Jesus in the Gennesaret region (6:53-56), and the sick on their pallets are brought from the whole neighbourhood. This is repeated throughout village, city and country - and as in the specific and general instances already referred to, touching even the fringe of his garments brings healing.

15. The disciples are not mentioned in the healing of the Syrophoenician woman's daughter (7:24-30), nor that of the deaf man with the speech impediment (7:31-37).

16. The disciples participate as much in the second feeding (8:1-9) as the first. This almost unwitting participation raises distinctive issues, to which we shall return.

17. Since 'they' come to Bethsaida, the disciples are included by implication in the healing of the blind man, whom Jesus heals in two stages (8:22-26). Bethsaida was the goal of the first journey across the lake (6:45), during which Mark tells us about their hardness of heart and failure to understand about the loaves of the first feeding. Here, again, Jesus is in the boat with the disciples, questioning them about the two feedings together (8:18-21). He concludes with the question 'Do you not then understand?' - and immediately we are in Bethsaida <u>again</u>, where the blind man who does not see on the first occasion, 'looks intently' on the second occasion, and sees everything clearly.

18. Peter, James and John witness Jesus' transfiguration (9:2-8), and hear the voice from the overshadowing cloud 'This is my beloved Son'. One would like to know whether, in Mark's mind, there is a connection between the kind of change intimated by 'transfigured', and the kind of change presumed by the account of

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* In the account of the Resurrection appearance (Lk. 24:39), Jesus appears among the disciples while they are discussing his making himself known in the breaking of the bread. He says, 'See my hands and my feet, that it is I myself; handle me, and see; for a spirit has not flesh and bones as you see that I have.' There is no walking on the water in Luke. The point is that the Resurrection appearance and the Markan sea-miracle contain similar elements: action with bread that is broken, and a disclosure of non-ghostly identity.

walking on the water, where Jesus is so altered as to pass unrecognized, mistaken for a ghost. A further change is suggested at the transfiguration. On the way down the mountain, Jesus tells the three disciples to tell no one of what they had seen 'until the Son of man should have risen from the dead' (9:9) - something, it seems, they have little comprehension of, but which seems to be the great 'change' or even 'permanent transfiguration' to which he is going (8:31, 9:9, 9:31, 10:34).

19. The disciples are unable to heal the boy with the dumb spirit (9:14-29), though, following Jesus' healing, they are instructed by him (9:29).

20. The disciples are with Jesus on the way to Jerusalem, following him in amazement and fear (10:32). Jesus again tells them what is going to happen, culminating in his rising from the dead. James and John respond by asking to sit at Jesus' right and left. Jesus responds, teaching them that true greatness consists of being the servant of all, and how he himself has come to serve by giving his life as a ransom for many. The miracles prior to their arrival at Jerusalem cease with Bartimaeus, the blind beggar, receiving his sight at Jesus' commendatory word, and following him in the way (10:46-52). We may hope that the disciples, likewise, are doing the same.

21. The disciples discover that the fig tree withers in the space of twenty four hours, between Jesus' address to it on the occasion of his unseasonal search for fruit, and their return on the next morning (11:12-22). Betweentimes, Jesus has driven the traders from the Temple, and called it 'a den of robbers' - whereas it is intended to be 'a house of prayer for all nations'.

A Composite Picture

Having been with Jesus in all these miracles, the disciples will have some understanding of his capacities in these areas. They have seen his authority over the unclean spirits, and heard their identificatory cries - holy one of God or Son of God. They will know that Jesus' power has a universal tendency, both in geographic region and in the kinds of complaint that it overcomes. He had the power to affect whole towns and regions, though the power to heal can be resisted (6:1-6). The power to heal is quasi-automatic for those who do not exhibit 'unbelief': - twice generally (3:1-10, 6:56), and once in detail (5:25-34), this healing by mere proximity to Jesus is described. Furthermore, the authority to heal and to cast out

demons can be given away, shared out or delegated (6:7-13), even if the disciples' use of this power meets with mixed success (compare 6:13 with 9:18,28).

Three disciples being present at the raising of Jairus' daughter cannot be understood as giving the disciples in Mark a clear perception of unlimited power over the dead. Mark's disciples do not go to Nain with Jesus and see, along with the great crowd that followed him and the large crowd from the city, the dead man on his way to the graveyard restored to life. Neither do they see something even greater at Bethany.

We see, even within Mark, a capacity for people to conclude quickly that some states are in fact death. When the dumb spirit is banished from the boy (9:25), we notice that 'most of them said, "He is dead".' While Mark is translated 'But Jesus took him by the hand and lifted him up, and he arose', we need not take this 'but' to imply that the Evangelist knows that the boy was not in fact dead. The Greek for 'lifted him up' and 'arose' is virtually the same as that used when Jesus raised Jairus' daughter, and his outward action in taking the child by the hand is also similar. Mark's 'But' can in fact counteract the 'fact' of the death, rather than express his difference of opinion as to whether the boy was really dead.* - 'Many said he was dead but Jesus raised him up'. The point would be clearer if the Greek for 'but' were rendered 'and', or left untranslated.

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* Not insignificant similarities exist between the raisings from the dead attributed to Jesus by the Evangelists, and those attributed to Francis Xavier in the sixteenth century. The similarities concern the increase in the scale of the miracle between the Jairus accounts, the widow of Nain's son, and then the great miracle of raising Lazarus. Francis' miracles underwent an unmistakable process of magnification, despite the fact that when asked directly, he always denied that he had raised the dead. Schurhammer gives an account of one basic incident where Francis restored a boy after a near drowning. Those present, however, insist that the boy had been dead and that a great miracle had taken place. Francis' protestations that the boy was not dead are taken as the humility of the saint. Schurhammer adds, 'The miracle of the well at Kombutere is the first mentioned and the most famous of the so-called raisings from the dead wrought by Xavier. A whole series of others is derived from it'. G. Schurhammer, Francis Xavier:His Life, His Times, Vol. II, India 1541-1545 (Rome: The Jesuit Historical Institute, 1977, German edition 1963), pp. 344-6 and n. 443, p. 344. Schurhammer makes significant observations on how uncertainty over the original site is combined with a tradition of 'different' raisings attaching to each of these sites. Sometimes a boy is involved, sometimes a girl, sometimes more than one person. While not referred to by Schurhammer, there

Even granted that within Mark, Jesus' power to raise the dead is somewhat more modestly portrayed than in Luke and John, and even Matthew, where the request is from the first to raise the dead

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is a version of the raising attributed to Francis in which the deceased had already been buried twenty four hours and begun to putrify. Schurhammer does refer to one version of the well incident in which the child had been in the water for many hours. A second incident also points out the capacity to see a miracle over death where something else lies at an historical core. The recovery of versions of the same incident in different languages (Portugese and Latin) enables this distinction to be made. In the Latin version, the boy companion of Xavier falls down and dies in agony, with a foaming mouth, having been seen to have been bitten by a poisonous snake. Xavier prays, anoints the wound on his foot with spittle and calls the dead boy back to life. In the Portugese version, the boy falls unconscious to the ground, foaming at the mouth as if dead. Xavier prays and the boy rises and serves him. All attribute his collapse to the bite of a poisonous creature, though none is seen. Other versions of the account exist in which the snake plays an ever increasing part, is seen and identified as a dreaded hooded-Cobra, and the length of time between the bite and attendant death, and the appeal to Xavier increases. Schurhammer treats the 'fact' as probably a case of epilepsy (Ibid., n. 451, p. 346). Other miracles attributed to Xavier, and collected from 'witnesses' include levitation during prayer and meditation, enabling a companion to walk on water, and the miraculous creation of money. The coins concerned begin life as 'some coins' (which he draws from his pocket after apparently declining to give alms, and when he is 'known' to possess no money), then become 'a handful of fanams', coins of the finest gold and silver, and then, more than fifty in number (Ibid., pp. 340, 343-4 and n. 441). Thurston and Attwater redescribe the miracle of Xavier's gift of tongues by which he was said to be able to converse and hold disputations in Japanese while unlearned in the language, as a legend that grew up out of the imagination and ignorance of unreliable witnesses in the beatification process. They conclude that 'many of the miraculous incidents recorded in the early biographies of the saint must now be rejected as mythical'. Butler's Lives of the Saints, Edited, Revised and Supplemented by Herbert Thurston and Donald Attwater, IV. (London: Burns and Oates, 1956), p. 481. Earlier lives simply put forward the miraculous fact as certain. 'People were led to hear him and receive the truths which he had preached by finding a man who could never have learnt their language addressing himself to them with ease and by observing that bystanders whose dialect differed from their own were as well able to understand him as themselves.' Henry James Coleridge, The Life and Letters of St. Francis Xavier, Vol. I (London: Burns and Oates, 2nd ed., 1890), p. 173. Coleridge also recounts the miracle of the well, referring to the corpse of a boy brought to Xavier, and in the other incident refers non-problematically to the Cobra as the agent of death. As Schurhammer points out, even within three decades of the events, some of Xavier's compatriots who had inquired into the subject, thought the miracles somewhat doubtful (p. 345, n. 443). The most dramatic account of a raising is given in the 1759 edition of Butler's Lives. He refers to the incident at the well, and the 'raising' where a poisonous bite is involved, and to two 'other' raisings mentioned in the canonization process (p. 860). However, seemingly referring to yet two more incidents, he writes in another place, 'As the saint was preaching one day at Coulon, a village in Travancor,

child (9:18), the disciples have still, cumulatively, been depicted as witnesses to an impressive array of wonders. Jesus has demonstrated a comprehensive power over disease and illness and the unclean spirits. He has subdued the wind and waves, and walked on the water, and on two occasions, provided a large amount of food out of a little. He has been identified by the spirits, and more importantly, by the heavenly voice. As the narrative unfolds, the disciples can be presumed to have witnessed these things, and this creates something of a context for understanding their place in the complete Gospel. For example, Judas who betrays Jesus is equally a witness of all these things, and, no doubt, one of the twelve sent out to heal and exorcise. At the Last Supper, they are eating with Jesus the miracle worker, and Peter denies the one whom he has seen do these things.

Having encountered all these miracles, we not unnaturally expect to find some reference to the disciples' response to these extraordinary things - indeed, the greater the miracle, the greater the impact. We expect their conduct to be informed by what they have seen - at the least, by responding to Jesus as to one known to possess these powers. At 6:45-52, Jesus walks on the water and the disciples are terrified and astonished. But they make no further, immediate

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near Cape Cormorin, perceiving that few were converted by his discourse, he made a short prayer that God would honour the blood and name of his beloved Son by softening the hearts of the most obdurate. Then he bade some of the people open the grave of a man who was buried the day before near the place where he preached; and the body was beginning to putrify with a noisome scent, which he desired the bystanders to observe. Then falling on his knees, after a short prayer, he commanded the dead man in the name of the living God to arise. At these words the dead man arose, and appeared not only living, but vigorous and in perfect health. All who were present were so struck with this evidence, that throwing themselves at the saint's feet they demanded baptism. The holy man also raised to life on the same coast a young man who was a Christian, whose corpse he met as it was carried to the grave. To preserve the memory of this wonderful action the parents of the deceased who were present, erected a great cross on the place where the miracle was wrought.' Alban Butler, The Lives of the Fathers, Martyrs, and the Principal Saints: Compiled from Original Monuments, and other Authentick Records: Illustrated with the Remarks of judicious modern Criticks and Historians, Vol. IV, Part II (London, 1759), p. 862.

response. Mark refers to their lack of comprehension about the loaves and to their hearts being hardened. In Matthew 14:22-33, however, not only does Peter join Jesus on the water, those in the boat worship Jesus as the Son of God in response to the miracle. In John, at the raising of Lazarus, Martha responds to Jesus as the Christ, the Son of God before the miracle takes place (though no acclamation occurs with the walking on the water).

Mark remains distinctive because at no point in the narrative do the disciples respond to Jesus with anything like this identificatory response. 'Son of God' is absent from their lips from start to finish, though, arguably, it is the principal identificatory term used by the Evangelist to present his Gospel. Even in spite of the transfiguration and the voice addressed to them, Peter, James and John do not formally identify Jesus as the Son of God. What Mark announces to his audience remains enigmatically hidden from those closest to Jesus throughout the scope of 1:1 - 16:8.

Only the Roman centurion standing by the dying Jesus is allowed to make the acclamatory response, at the moment of the death. On the face of it, he is a most unlikely candidate for the task - not one of those who has been with Jesus all along. Presumably he has seen the prodigy of the three hours' darkness, though the tearing of the Temple curtain would not of course be known to him. As far as the miracles are concerned, he has seen far less than the twelve. Yet it is this gentile, this Roman soldier, one, even, of the agents in the crucifixion itself who first responds to Jesus as to the Son of God. Without implying anything at all derogatory by the terms, one cannot but feel that this is a very powerful piece of 'ecumenical propaganda' that would have a definite impact on a Roman audience. It certainly points to a subsequent direction to be taken by the movement that will be re-formed by the Resurrection to come.

If we begin by expecting the great miracles to reveal Jesus' identity (especially to those closest to him), since they are clear signs of God's power, we encounter the enigma that precisely the greatest wonders in Mark (the two feeding miracles and the walking on the water) evoke no comprehending response from the twelve. Where we might expect a miracle to disclose Jesus to the twelve, Mark has Jesus in his death revealed to the pagan soldier standing by. Theissen writes of miracle in this respect,

> Mark extends the arch which is inherent in all the miracle stories, viz. between the miracle and the intended reaction of the audience, to the whole gospel. The compositional structure

> of the miracle stories is the basis of his overarching composition. A miraculous, mysterious event prompts a declaration. Miracle stories are used to create a miraculous story with a mysteriously delayed acclamation. For this reason we call Mark's gospel an 'aretalogical gospel composition' based on motifs of secrecy and acclamation. Mark's art as an author lies precisely in retaining both the integrity of the small units and the form of the whole, in other words, in integrating the individual traditions in such a way that they remain self-contained but at the same time point beyond themselves, and, conversely, in structuring the whole so that it is held together by an inner dynamic without reducing the small units to the role of mere transitional stages.[5]

Given that this is so, it seems that a definite Markan intention towards his miracle material begins to emerge, as he uses the expected response to miracle, which is not forthcoming, to create a framework for the acclamation when it comes. This does not, need it be said, imply that Mark doubts that the miracles occurred, nor imply that he denigrates the miracles in any way. It points out what is revealed by Jesus, and when, and that an enigma hung over him - even beyond the identification on the cross - for as yet, the women have not made their way to the tomb. By contrast, no soldier standing by John the Baptist identifies <u>him</u> as the Son of God, though outwardly, is not his death similar? The story of John effectively ends when his disciples lay his body in the tomb.

It is not only the miracles from which Mark expects a response to be elicited that is not forthcoming. Even in Jesus' parables, the response of the twelve is not simply one of comprehension, or even of asking from Jesus and getting a 'cognitive' explanation. In chapter four, Jesus delivers the parable of the sower who went out to sow, and though the disciples ask about its meaning, Jesus does not, at first merely explain it to them. Rather, they are contrasted by Jesus with those who are not disciples and for whom the teaching is all 'parables' or riddles. The disciples, however, <u>have already been given the secret of the kingdom of God</u> (4:11), clearly marking them off from those on the outside who have not. Jesus then puts forward, as if a matter of surprise, that those to whom the secret has been given, cannot even understand the parable(s). 'Do you not understand this parable? How then will you understand all the parables?' (4:13). When we add the non-comprehension and hardness of heart in the face of the miracles, and the lack of acclamatory, titular recognition, it seems that the Markan audience is hard-pushed to find a place in the narrative where those closest to Jesus move out from behind this barrier, or penetrate the veil that hangs between them and Jesus.

We could, however, conclude that such a change among the disciples is both a pre-condition for the formation of a community in which a gospel of Jesus Christ would even have a place, and that the transformation of the disciples is intimated not only at 16:7 in the command to the women to tell them of Jesus' being risen, but also in 1:8 where John the Baptist announces what Jesus will achieve - baptism with the Holy Spirit.

Throughout Mark, however, the miracles have no cumulative effect on the twelve. Nothing, as it were, becomes clearer to them. Peter's identification of Jesus as the Christ is a 'minimal' identification. It is sufficient for Jesus to charge them to silence concerning it (8:30), but when, immediately afterwards, Jesus teaches them about his specific fate, Peter's comprehension of 'Christ' is rejected as Satanic.* Peter has only used the right word, but not with a sense acceptable to Jesus.

There is no application of insight from one point in the text to the next, and having seen a number of great miracles, they never anticipate the next. It is, also, as if Jesus never spoke to them about his great miracles, or about to what they were leading, and what, if anything, they signified. This tension between witnessed miracle, announced rising from the dead and then the disciples' complete failure to anticipate or even expect the Resurrection tells against locating Mark's miracles in pragmatic history. I cannot imagine that a Jesus acting in pragmatic history with these superlatives of miraculous power and insight into his own Resurrection to come would not be able to create an altogether different response in those closest to him.

I refer the reader again at this stage to the title question of this chapter. If, in pragmatic history, Jesus' disciples saw his extraordinary power manifested in diverse ways (leaving aside the Johannine miracles for the moment), on top of which he tells them of his end to come, how can they remain unprepared for it? Literal

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*Morton Smith, Tannaitic Parallels to the Gospels, Journal of Biblical Literature Monograph Series, Vol. VI (Philadelphia, 1968 (1951)), p. 31, comments on the 'inconsistency' of having Jesus turn to Peter and tell him to 'Get behind me', when that is precisely what he is already, behind him. He wonders whether an original meaning 'Get from behind me' applies. Jesus is telling Peter to get out from behind him; in effect, to cease to be his disciple and to stop following him in the way, so long as he thinks not with God but with satan.

miracle plus a plain announcement of Resurrection to come, made more than once, would seem to be sufficient to prepare the twelve. This was a point that much perplexed Strauss, whereas at the same time, Newman was magnifying the native astuteness of the Galileans. From the following, highly artificial, but not unreasonable dialogue,* we can see the difference between Mark and a work in which the teacher-disciple relationship was put on a more 'philosophical' basis, and the subject of miracles and Resurrection opened up for discussion.

Jesus. The son of man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and the chief priests and the scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again.

Peter. I don't like the idea of this at all. But I do have an idea of your miraculous power, since just now you have multiplied a few loaves and fish on two occasions. I have also seen you exercise your authority over the wind and the sea, and walk across the lake. Indeed, if I am the Matthean Peter, I have even joined you on the water. And you have raised dead people to life. So, could you please tell us a little more about this 'rising from the dead' as I am getting no answers from James and John? (9:10)

Jesus. Well, you are right to start with all my miracles. Mostly, I have worked them on other people. When I have died, the miracle will be worked on me. I might even work it myself. It will have the effect of causing my body to absent the tomb, and overall, I won't be quite the same as I am now - though it will be really me.

Peter. I think I see. Just as when I take a fish and dry it, it is numerically the same fish but different in important ways, you will be the same Jesus in rising from the dead, only different in some ways.

Jesus. Something like that. So don't be too distressed at what takes place. It's only a foreseen, necessary preliminary to Resurrection on the third day.

Peter. We'll take you word for it. We know your power is virtually limitless, and this Resurrection sounds wonderful. Ever since Adam we have waited for death to be undone - when do we leave for Jerusalem?

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* I constructed this dialogue after considering the greatness of Jesus' miracles and reading the dialogues in Dorothy L. Sayers', The Man Born to be King, a Play Cycle on the Life of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ (London: Victor Gollancz, 1943). In particular, the fifth play, 'The Bread of Heaven', Scene V, the discussion between Jesus and Simon, p. 155. She wrote in her introduction, 'This story of the life and murder and resurrection of God-in-Man is not only the symbol and epitome of the relations of God and man throughout time, it is also a series of events that took place at a particular point in time. And the people of that time had not the faintest idea that it was happening.' (p. 21) But as I have tried to point out in my dialogue, if they had attended to the miracles and asked not overly-difficult questions of Jesus, they would have had at least 'the faintest idea'. She writes of what she calls Catholic theology and its role in her play. 'It locks the whole structure into a massive intellectual coherence.' In reality, her approach to the historical dimension in the Gospels glosses the problems raised by the very magnitude of the miracles.

Does not something like this bizarre, yet rigidly logical conversation become a possibility when we magnify Jesus' miracles to their limits and locate them as pragmatic* events in history? It certainly points out the kind of thing that Mark does not permit the miracles to achieve within this Gospel. It seems to me to be an example of the kind of psychologizing that Wrede would permit to be imported, to ask what response witnesses to consistent, cumulatively great miracles could be expected to make, especially when this is accompanied by oft-repeated references to a rising from the dead yet to come.

On the other hand, we would not be warranted to turn immediately to the conclusion that Mark has constructed an inconsistent narrative, nor one in which he is directing a polemic against miracles, or indeed the disciples. One would be obliged to look for other examples of response made to seemingly massive revelation or wonderful events, where non, minimal or inadequate response was a significant factor.**

Even the longer, later endings to Mark are faithful to this gulf between Jesus and the twelve, despite the miracles and the announced Resurrection. At 16:13, the disciples still will not believe the reports of 'two of them' that Jesus has appeared to them!

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*'pragmatic': treating facts of history with reference to their practical lessons. Concise Oxford Dictionary

**In Exodus, there is a consistent theme of resistance to miraculous intrusions by God. Moses is not moved by the awesomeness of the initial revelation, and is more than reluctant to go despite the theophany and the miraculous powers with which he is equipped (3:11, 4:3-5). Even when the power and anger of the Lord are added, it is barely sufficient to keep Moses at his task (4:10-13). Great miracles are even less effective on Pharoah, whose response is consistently given under the enigmatic 'But his heart was hardened' (7:13, 7:22, 8:15, 8:19, 8:32, 9:7, 9:12, 9:35, 10:1, 10:20, 10:27). Strangely, it seems that God who enacts the wonders is also responsible for the hardening of the heart which renders them ineffective. 'Moses and Aaron did all these wonders before Pharoah; and the Lord hardened Pharoah's heart, and did not let the people of Israel go out of his land' (11:10). This stands as a summary statement at the end of these wonders, just prior to the passover in which the first-born of Egypt are slain by the Lord. Hearts are 'softened' and the Israelites permitted to go, in accordance with the central announcement of God to Moses (4:21-23). When, however, the Israelites are in the wilderness, the wonders of God's provision, protection, and call to be his first-born son, meet with redoubtable resistance and obtuseness.

When Jesus finally comes to the eleven, he 'upbraids them for their unbelief and hardness of heart' as if we are back at the first feeding and the walking on the water.

The more one magnifies Jesus in and by his pre-Resurrection miracles, the harder it becomes to account for the disciples' failure to be fully prepared for, and anticipate, this end-event. The end that Mark comprehends from the beginning of his Gospel, and no doubt partly motivating him to write it, stands over against what any disciple within his drama has access to - and that despite the miracles and the voice from the cloud and Jesus being portrayed as knowing, completely, his own identity and goal.

The scale of Jesus' miracles sets the magnitude of the actions of others in the Gospel - generating an enormity to Judas' betrayal and Peter's denial. If, for example, we consider that Matthew is correct and that Peter did join Jesus on the water for a while, can we continue to believe that Peter would not form a strong presumptive insight into a Resurrection announced as to come? Lewis, after all, understood walking on the water as a miracle of the new or renewed nature in which nature would be subject totally to the human spirit. Peter participates in this? - but cannot anticipate a Resurrection of the one who has already admitted him into its power?

We see that it is significant for Mark that two feeding miracles occur. Only by overlooking or relativizing Jesus' dialogue with the disciples (8:19-21) can the fact of the two feedings be reduced to a mere duplication of extant traditions. But coming from men who have already participated in the first feeding miracle, their initial question at the second, 'How can one feed these men with bread here in the desert?' (8:4), is plainly inappropriate at one level. Perhaps Mark intends us to see the twelve responding inappropriately to Jesus in his miraculous power? Where he asks the disciples 'Do you not yet understand?' (8:21), it seems that at a basic level they have hardly noticed that even a miracle has already occurred once. They learn nothing from the first to prepare them for the second. If we persist in the quest for pragmatic miracles at this point, will we then try to reset them in a history in which they present no problems for belief? What then will we do with the strange issues raised by the Markan narrative? Despite the fact that Jesus makes much of both miracles, asking the disciples specific questions about details from both occasions, the second miracle is never a 'forethought' appearing on the twelve's 'horizon of possibility' - as if one more bold than the rest should say, 'You have miraculous power, you feed

the crowd here in the wilderness, as before.' My point is merely to show what Mark's undoubtedly serious purpose in telling of Jesus in his miracles cannot achieve - a recovery of an history in which he can be consistently approached with this kind of request, or even engaged in dialogue about the wider signification of any such miracles. As Q. Quesnell writes in preparation for an alternative response to miracle in Mark,

> One is not excessively surprised to see that happen which one knows ahead of time can happen. But any thinking man who had seen the miracle of the loaves would have known that Jesus was able to do anything he had a mind to do. Therefore such a man would have known, if he thought about it, that Jesus could also walk on water if he had a mind to do so. Therefore a reasonable man would not have been overly surprised if he did see Jesus coming to him walking on the water. But the disciples were excessively surprised (6:51). Therefore the disciples showed they were not reasonable men who had reflected as they should have on the implications of the miracle of the loaves. Equivalently 'their heart was hardened' (6:52).[6]

Quesnell's observations can also be readily extended to the Resurrection. The more one tries to credit Mark with writing with a specific, coherent intention, the less can one accept that he meant to locate the miracles of Jesus in anything that we would recognize as pragmatic or empirical history.* The point which I now feel I am able to make is that to locate Mark's miracles in a literal history, say by magnifying one's concept of the power and freedom of God at work in Jesus, raises more problems than it solves, for even a modest historical imagination. For it would then appear that Jesus and the twelve never sat down together and discussed the issues arising from the miracles so as to learn from them what Jesus intended them to learn. And if he did not expect them to learn something from them, then, after all, there can have been little point in doing them - which is especially so of those miracles which the disciples alone witness.

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*Quesnell resolves the issue by looking for a wider New Testament context in which enigma and non-understanding over the loaves would be dissolved. He posits an audience in the first century church for whom the term 'bread' is part of an extensive, complete eucharistic context (pp. 171-2, 176, 232) and shifts the final centre of interpretative interest from the twelve in Mark to the community who now possess the knowledge and insight that the twelve were not able to. 'What the apostles are rebuked for not understanding about the breads in 8:14-21 are ultimately all those things which the community of practicing Christians does now understand about them: that they, broken, announce the death of the Lord and look forward to His coming; that they express the Christian's share in that saving death; that they express the union of the Christian community with one another in Christ; etc.'

Robert M. Fowler's recent study of the feeding miracles concentrates on discernible Markan intentions in the narrative as it now stands, rather than on the recovery of earlier units of a miracle tradition.[7] He concentrates on the sense of distance or what we might call the 'revelation gap' between Jesus and those who are apparently his closest disciples. Mark finds its setting circa 66-70 A.D. where Christianity is self-consciously seeking to separate itself from Judaism and all things Jewish. The followers of the way have to re-define their standing with respect to Judaism against whose centre the Romans are about to move with decisive force. Mark is formed and told as part of a deliberate jettisoning of all things Jewish - and even Peter is scarcely given any hope of taking part in or finding a place in the community of those who understand Jesus correctly (p. 182). The Last Supper becomes the highlight of the confrontation between Jesus and the twelve.*

> Mark places the Last Supper under the domination of the theme of discipleship failure. Previously the disciples had misunderstood Jesus; hereafter they will deliver him up, abandon him, and deny him. The author's unique use of the feeding stories and the Last Supper effectively divorce Jesus' original disciples from the idea of discerning, faithful discipleship. . . . As the characters in Mark's story, they are the pawns through which the Markan drama is played out, thereby handing on to the reader the tradition they misunderstood (in the story!). In Mark's story they fail, but if Mark's portrayal of their failure achieves its objective, the reader will be more faithful than they and their failure will not have been utterly in vain.[8]

In my opinion, Fowler over-emphasizes the hostility and sense of exclusion directed towards the twelve, and towards Peter in

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*pp. 117-8; the disciples actually have sufficient money and are really being asked to empty their pockets to buy food for the crowd in the wilderness. Their possession of money amounts to a betrayal of their missionary charge to go out penniless. Furthermore, it is not the disciples and Jesus, who, earlier, had not had time and occasion even to eat, but the crowd that has been coming to and fro and thus not had the opportunity for food (p. 78). Then, by forgetting to take bread with them on the boat journey after the second feeding, the disciples have inadvertently fulfilled the command of apostolic, missionary poverty, without, however, realizing it (p. 119). These notions raise a number of problems. In the first place, it means that Jesus permits the twelve to keep the money in their wallets which they ought not even to have. He permits them to keep it by working the miracle. The claim that it was the crowd, not the disciples, who had been unable to eat, is equally tendentious. See also, Best, Mark: The Gospel as Story p. 48, 'Mark depends in the final issue on the reliability of the disciples in handing on the material he has used. He does not indicate any other source for that material. If he attacks those who transmitted it he attacks the value of what he himself writes. His community can hardly be expected to accept an attack on the disciples to whom in the end they owe all their knowledge of the way of the cross.'

particular (p. 175), for whom he allows only one brief respite (n. 1, p. 233). But his observations about the connection between the two feeding stories raises the question of the kind of intention Mark does have in presenting two great miracles, similar in so many respects, but with no sign that the disciples respond more adequately to the one than to the other. Fowler argues that Mark himself creates the first feeding story to determine and re-shape our response to the second account, which is the one that has come down to him from the tradition.

> After a detailed examination of the preeminent doublet in Mark, the feeding stories, we found no reason to conclude that they are variant, traditional stories. Rather, one story is traditional (8:1-10) and the other a Markan composition (6:30-44). The evangelist has composed his own story as a backdrop for the traditional story, thereby controlling how the reader perceives the traditional story.[9]

It could be said, though, that the greatly enhanced enigma created by this second feeding miracle is in fact a development, or re-expression of a factor fully present at the first feeding and the walking on the water: - the incapacity of the miracle to

1. evoke any identificatory response from the twelve.

2. admit the disciples into Jesus' confidence in such a way that they comprehend his authority and purpose.

3. establish a situation in which the disciples, by talking with Jesus, or reflecting on what they have experienced, discern the significance of these acts and the one that does them.

These issues are not dissolved by adopting a world-view or theology in which even the greatest wonders can occur regardless of the fabric of natural causality. It seems that such great events, if literal occurrences, must establish everything one needed or wanted to know about their perpetrator, or the opportunity to find out. This, decidedly, is not Mark's attitude towards them. Or, if he shares the presumption that the miracles ought to have done this, he is presenting his audience with the enigma of ineffective miracles, and the mystery of a very strange revelation.

The Withering of the Fig Tree

The withering of the fig tree has, like the other miracles, been both defended and attacked as a literal miracle of Jesus. An approach to Mark that tries to recover a sense of literal occurrence has, amongst many other things, to distinguish between the account in Mark (11:12-14, 20-25) where the miracle takes place discreetly

over a period of twenty four hours, and the account in Matthew where we are told (21:19) that the tree withers 'at once'. Attending to this latter account with even a restrained imagination, the mind 'boggles'* at what the disciples would have seen. This miracle would have raised the presumption that had he the mind to, he could have done anything at all, and if applied to the crucifixion itself, raised the expectation that this 'tree', too, could be miraculously affected.** Chrysostom, interpreting the account in Matthew approaches these possibilities where he writes that the miracle is,

> A demonstrative proof of His power to take vengeance also, that both the disciples might learn, and the Jews, that being able to blast them that crucify Him, of His own will He submits.[10]

This kind of apology, as we have begun to see, is set against the kind of historiography that we encounter in Mark, where any notion of the miracles, and indeed this miracle, as 'demonstrative proof' must be qualified by the minimal effect that the miracles have. They might indeed have the capacity to persuade a Gospel audience about the extent of the Divine power in Jesus, but that hardly seems to apply to any recoverable 'history' of Jesus and the disciples.

Chrysostom at least tries to provide a rationale for a very strange action. Objections to the miracle have often concentrated on it as an event so intrinsically offensive as to be automatically expunged from anything to do with Jesus as he must have been. Strauss, for all his wider objections to miracle as such, did not feel that he had to call upon these to dismiss the interpretation of this account that stressed its historicity.

> Thus we are inexorably thrown back from the naturalistic attempt at an explanation, to the conception of the supernaturalists, pre-eminently difficult as this is in the history before us. We pass over what might be said against the physical impossibility of such an influence

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* Woolston, Discourse 4, p. 23, uses this expression when discussing the Cana wine miracle.

** In The Infancy Story of Thomas (3:1-3), (4:1), Jesus curses children who spoil his games and they wither on the spot. He also stretches a piece of hewn timber so that Joseph can construct a bed. In The Gospel of Pseudo-Matthew (20:2), Jesus commands a palm tree to bend down and yield fruit for his mother. It stays bent until he tells it otherwise. See Hennecke, New Testament Apocrypha, Vol. 1. On power over bonds of imprisonment, Apollonius removes his limbs from the fetters, and then replaces them.

> as is there pre-supposed; not, indeed, because, with Hase, we could comprehend it through the medium of natural magic, but because another difficulty beforehand excludes this enquiry, and does not allow us to come to the consideration of the physical possibility. This decisive difficulty relates to the moral possibility of such an act on the part of Jesus. The miracle he here performs is of a punitive character. Another example of the kind is not found in the canonical accounts of the life of Jesus; the apocryphal gospels alone, as has been remarked, are full of such miracles.[11]

Whether or not Strauss' appeal to morality can be modified by the recovery of a context in which the act is quite legitimate as a reversal of Jewish hopes of the age to come (in which the Lord comes to the Temple to fight for Israel and to inaugurate the time in which all distinctions between the seasons will be done away with, and universal plenty reign) he is undoubtedly correct to contrast this action with 'moral' themes of other parts of the Gospels. At Luke 9:55-6, Jesus rejects the use of Divine power to exact vengeance on an unresponsive village. Matthew 12:20 applies Isaiah 42:1-4 on the servant of the Lord who 'will not break a bruised reed' to Jesus. Elsewhere, Strauss objects to Jesus' great miracles on the ground that they often involve a simply human command causing a response where there is no rational capacity to understand that a command has been given. That is, the command does not work by being 'understood' by anything that then obeys it. He applies something like this insight to the fig tree incident, where he maintains that 'The moral end of punishment can have no existence in relation to a tree'.[12] At first sight, it seems that Jesus has cursed the tree simply for its failure to appease his hunger - at a season when no reasonable person would expect a tree to be in fruit.* Not only does the sphere of human morality not impinge upon the domain of trees,

> The evil condition of the tree was not habitual but temporary; still further, if we follow Mark, it was not even objective, or existing intrinsically in the tree, but purely subjective,

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*Strauss repeats the objections of Woolston, a century before, who writes (Discourse 4) 'In any other person than Jesus, such an act would be severely blamed' and again, 'If a Kentish countryman were to seek for fruit in his garden in spring, and were to cut down the trees that had none, he would be a common laughing stock'. If this is what the gospels are saying, Strauss and Woolston are unobjectionably correct. The inadequacies of some responses of the day are illustrated by Stackhouse's contemporary response to Woolston, A Fair State of the Controversy (1729), p. 43, who wrote that the fig tree was like a hedgerow tree 'common as highway apples in Herefordshire' - fit to be blasted as a manifest encumbrance to the ground and a delusion to travellers. In R.M. Burns, The Great Debate, pp. 120-1).

> that is, a result of the accidental relation of the tree to the momentary wish and want of Jesus. For according to an addition which forms the second feature peculiar to Mark in this narrative, it was not then the time of figs (v. 13); it was not therefore a defect, but, on the contrary, quite in order, that this tree, as well as others, had no figs on it, and Jesus (in whom it is already enough to excite surprise that he expected to find figs on the tree so out of season) might at least have reflected, when he found none, on the groundlessness of his expectation.[13]

Much more recently, E. Best has similarly referred to the Markan comment, 'it was not then the time of figs', as indicating Mark's own doubts about what he is narrating having actually taken place - though in general, 'there is no reason to doubt that he believed what he wrote had in broad outline actually happened'.[14] The response of the conservative critic Van der Loos is of interest at this point, because in almost all cases, he concludes that Jesus' miracles did in fact take place. He draws the line at this miracle because he can only see it as a punitive miracle worked for his own benefit and in response to a personal desire not being met, and 'nowhere do we encounter such an idea in the Gospels'.[15] Agreeing in this case with some who constantly dispense with miracle as occurrence, he concludes that here, we have a pronouncement or parable that underwent 'some historical surgery'.[16] *

Once people have decided that the two accounts of the miracle do not depict a miraculous event worked by Jesus, or worked by God as some kind of response to Jesus' deed, a number

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*Further moral objections based on beliefs about Jesus' character, and the kind of thing he would be likely to do, are found in A. B. Bruce, The Miraculous Element in the Gospels (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1886), pp. 148, 242, 244; and A. M. Hunter, The Gospel According to St. Mark: Introduction and Commentary, p. 110. R. H. Fuller's apparent concession 'no one can say Jesus could not have cursed the fig tree' amounts to an effective denial that he literally did. He adds a reference to Archbishop Lang cursing a hotel built on a fishing loch - which then burnt down a couple of weeks later. He makes his own suggestions to account for the origin of the story. R.H. Fuller, Interpreting the Miracles, p. 38.

of possible sources emerge for the story.* Among these are; sayings of Jesus, perhaps a parable, or a reference to the nearness of the age to come, or a number of Old Testament motifs - which of course could figure in sayings of Jesus. There is the additional possibility that a literal fig tree was involved, but, originally, no miracle.

W. L. Lane believes that 'His act was an example of prophetic realism similar to the symbolic actions of the Old Testament prophets'.[17] Jesus even had the words of Micah 7:1-6 running through his mind as he approached the tree. However, Peter, not Jesus, is responsible for the incident being taken as a curse.

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* Luke 13:6-9; In this parable, the gardener gains an extra, fourth year for the vine that had been barren for three. Matthew 3:10; John the Baptist and the axe poised at the roots of the tree - where the issue is repentance and its 'fit fruits'. Mark 14:25; Jesus speaks of not drinking wine again until the Kingdom of God comes. R. H. Hiers, 'Not the Season for Figs', Journal of Biblical Literature Vol. LXXXVII 1968, pp. 397-8, suggests a parallel statement concerning not eating figs until the Kingdom comes, which becomes transformed into a miracle of cursing. Micah 7:1-2; The prophet laments the absence from the earth of the godly and upright - and to search for them is to look for the new season's fruit so desirable to the soul - but at the end of the season when all has been gathered and none will be found. Chapters three and four are concerned with the destruction and restoration of Jerusalem, in which 'Temple', 'vine' and 'fig' all figure. Zechariah 14; The Lord himself comes to fight against Jerusalem's enemies and his feet will stand upon the Mount of Olives which will split apart and be moved. All seasonal distinctions will vanish, and there will be no traders left in the Temple. Ezekiel 47:12; A river of life flows from the Temple and trees by its banks never wither, but yield fresh fruit every month. Jeremiah 8:13; The prophet delivers an address to Israel, as from God. Following his account of the people's departure from God and their wickedness, he speaks of the Lord seeking to gather grapes from the vine and figs from the tree - but there are none and even the leaves are withered away. Jonah 4:6-11; Reference has been made to the sea wonders in the Gospels being based on elements in the Jonah story, and there is also the story at the end of Jonah about the plant that grows and withers prodigiously - and Jonah pities the plant, but not the city of much greater worth. In the Jonah story, God makes the plant grow, and on the dawn, sends a worm to attack it. It is prodigious in its growth and decline. It may be, that in the Gospel story, the prodigy, too, is not confined to the demise of the tree. If the <u>leaf</u> that draws Jesus to the tree is indeed the leaf normally on the tree when it is in fruit, then its presence is as much a wonder as it would be if fruit were on it. That is, miracle does not begin when the tree withers, but when the leaf first appears on the tree. The fig 'grows' <u>and</u> withers prodigiously, but produces no fruit in the process. That particular kind of leaf would not normally be on the tree, and Jesus is drawn by what is already wonderful - the unseasonal leaf.

> Jesus addressed a formal prohibition to the tree, which said nothing of destruction but only that no one will eat of its fruit. Nevertheless, Peter interprets Jesus' action in the categories of a curse on the following day when the tree was withered.[18]

I'm not sure what the distinction between a formal prohibition and a curse is, where a tree is involved, but I do expect that Jesus could have illuminated Peter on the subject if it was worth grasping.

If we look to an incident in which a literal tree figured, questions of horticulture become somewhat significant. Unfortunately, much of the energy expended in the quest of the historical fig tree has been directed towards establishing that, after all, Jesus could have reasonably expected to find fruit on the tree at this time of year.* W. Barclay gives as good an account as any of the details of fig growth and maturation.[19] Whether we are concerned with the paggim, the first appearing figs, even appearing before the leaves, they are never edible before June. Neither is any fruit remaining from the previous season still edible. Barclay concludes that a real fig tree was involved, but that it was a diseased one which Jesus deliberately picked out for opportune teaching. By means of the diseased tree, he taught that 'uselessness invites disaster' and 'profession must equal performance'.

> It is very far from being the story of how Jesus in a moment's petulance destroyed a fig tree because he found no figs on it. It is a story of how he used the death and destruction of a diseased and deceiving tree to warn men of the useless and hypocritical life.[20]

Unfortunately, going by the assessment of miracle in the ancient world that Barclay provides in another place, it remains very unlikely that this is how Mark and his audience would have understood the incident.[21] There is nothing natural about the demise of the tree in Mark.

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*Whiston, translating Josephus (Wars, III.10.8) adds a note about this incident to the passage where Josephus refers to the Gennesareth region as a veritable paradise yielding autumnal fruit beyond expectation and where grapes and figs can be found for ten months of the year. Whiston concludes that the tree which Jesus saw was covered with old leaves and that he expected to find some old figs 'which even with us commonly hang on the tree all winter long'. This, I suppose, would account for the absence of the leaves on the morning - they were old and a night wind had blown them off! Telford, The Barren Temple and the Withered Tree, pp. 3-4, refers to a number of such quests including photographic evidence of branches laden with figs at passover time, and of an unripe fig plucked on April 16th, 1936, described as fit to be eaten by hungry Palestinians.

As I understand the matter, Strauss effectively demolished, in 1835, interpretations of the story that revert to nothing more than natural events. Barclay's proto-type is found in Leben Jesu where Strauss writes of those holding the view that Jesus

> judiciously availed himself of the occasion of finding a barren tree, in order to impress a truth on his disciples more vividly and indelibly than by words , . . that the Jewish nation which persisted in rendering no pleasing fruit to God and to the Messiah, would be destroyed; or . . . that everyone who was as destitute of good works as this tree was of fruit had to look forward to a similar condemnation.[22]

Strauss dismisses this because it plainly departs from the Markan/Matthean meaning in which the mode of action is miraculous, and Jesus' word is, effectively, responsible for the fate of the tree. It replaces the problem of miracle with a 'history' in which there are no problems - except that the Evangelists say nothing about such a history. Furthermore, Jesus does not go on to teach, or to re-inforce his didactic action with further judicious comments, but seems to speak of extending a like, and even greater power to his followers. Barclay does, however, agree with Strauss that the fundamental problem with the story lies in the morality of the action.[23] Other scholars persist in trying to find an actual tree and a factor in the tree that made it deserve its fate. Gould writes that 'the presence of leaves constituted the false appearance of the tree, as on the fig tree, these are the sign of fruit'. Thus, both the tree and Israel are hypocrites.

> Jesus was on the eve of spiritual conflict with a nation whose prime and patent fault was hypocrisy or false pretence, and here he finds a tree guilty of the same thing.[24]

There is definitely something to be explored in Gould's claim that the condition of the leaves on the tree was a proper indicator that fruit would be found. Fundamental problems remain with attributing anything like 'hypocrisy' to a tree, and he makes nothing of the possibility that <u>it is in itself extraordinary that a tree would be in a condition (at that unseasonal time) which creates the presumption that it is in fruit</u>. That is, the prodigy might not begin with Jesus' withering address to the tree, but with the tree being in this kind of leaf. If it was not the season for figs, it could well have been not the season for a fig tree to be in fruit-suggesting leaf.

However, the central point is that Mark tells us that it was not the season for figs, and that in the ordinary course of things, there would be no reason to find any on the tree. This

observation must stand with a resolve not to depart too readily from what the Evangelist says for the sake of recovering a more 'likely' happening. As Telford writes, 'One can in principle imagine a limitless number of historical scenarios'.[25] After surveying a number of interpretations of the accounts, Telford concludes,

> Earlier exegesis has focussed, we believe, too much on the historicity of the story. It has been guided over much by the dogmatic concern to remove the story's apparent blot on Jesus' character. Form-critical studies, on the other hand, have placed undue emphasis on the story's origin . . . our study will seek primarily to examine the pericope's function within Mark's redactional scheme. . . . What did Mark intend his story to convey in its present context, and how in turn was it likely to have been understood by the first century reader for whom it was intended?[26]

This does seem to be a good place to begin, but some interpreters seem to think that this solves problems with respect to the issues raised by miracle itself. For example, Schillebeeckx writes,

> Fortunately, at least in exegetical circles, this controversy is largely over, thanks to the growing awareness of a prior and more fundamental issue, namely, what are the evangelists really getting at in reporting the wonders performed by Jesus? Only when that question has been answered can we raise the second and third order question as to whether Jesus actually did perform miracles and, if so, which ones.[27] (Italics mine).

And Schweizer writes,

> If we ask whether or not the story really happened in this way, it is obvious that we have not reached a proper understanding of it. We will understand the story correctly only if we ask what Mark wanted to tell us about Jesus in it.[28] (Italics mine)

At one level at least, it seems that the Evangelists are really wanting to tell their audience that Jesus withered a fig tree, even, right in front of their very eyes, on the spot. A decision not to concur with their intention would then owe more to our beliefs about what is and what is not possible, or likely, than to what we discovered that they were really saying.

Strauss doubted that this story had a specific affinity to Old Testament sources, and saw its origin in other New Testament traditions about Jesus. Parables or sayings are set in an historical form, as literal events, with an increase in the miraculous dimension. Tradition is responsible for the formation of the miracle story out of something else.

> With the transformation of the parable into a history, its original sense also was lost, and as the miracle began to be regarded as constituting the pith of the matter, that discourse on miraculous power was erroneously annexed to it.[29]

There is a sense in which interpreters since then can be seen to repeat what was well said then.*

Completing a survey of beliefs that accommodate an incident involving a literal tree, we find J. Jeremias appealing to the likelihood of linguistic misunderstanding transforming a statement with a non-miraculous intent into a miracle-potent utterance.

> The story of the cursing of the fig tree (Mark 11:12-14, 20) is another miracle that may have grown up from a linguistic misunderstanding. The Aramaic imperfect yēkōl, which underlies φάγοι in v. 14, was ambiguous. It could originally have had a future sense, and then could have been understood wrongly as an optative. Once we allow this possibility, we can see how an announcement of the nearness of the end ('No one will ever eat fruit from you again - because the end will have come before it is ripe - ') might have become a curse (May no one ever eat fruit from you again') and then a cursing miracle.[30]

R. H. Hiers responds to the story in a similar fashion, concentrating on Old Testament motifs to provide the rationale for what Jesus actually did.

> Jesus expected to find fruit on the fig tree because he was expecting the Messianic age to begin, for in the Messianic Age, figs - together with all other products of nature - would always be in season.[31]

Where the miraculous demise of the tree becomes an issue, Hiers shifts to something like Jeremias' position.

> In Mark's version of the saying, unlike Matthew's (21:19b) which is probably secondary, the tree is not condemned to eternal, or even temporary fruitlessness; rather, Jesus hopes, vows, or commands, that no one eats of its fruit again, at any rate, until the arrival of the coming age. Perhaps in that age it, like all other trees, would at last, become supernaturally fruitful. Or, it may be that Jesus was simply promising (or praying) that the Kingdom of God would come before the next season for figs, viz., within two or three months.[32]

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*A. W. F. Blunt, The Clarendon Bible Commentary (1929), a parable which became translated into a miracle (p. 226). F. W. Beare, The Earliest Records of Jesus (p. 206) suggests that this miracle story is 'a secondary form of the parable' in Luke. Schweizer in his commentary on Mark also notes the similarity of this prophetic sign to Luke's parable (p. 235). He believes that the reference to Jesus' being hungry was added later as an inadequate attempt to provide a motive for Jesus' curse (p. 232). M. Hengel, The Charismatic Leader and His Followers (p. 67), writes that 'his deeds and attitudes can at decisive points acquire the character of parables - comparably with the Old Testament prophets but transcending them'. In n. 116, p. 67, he refers to the fig tree/Temple incident as 'a symbolic action that originally developed out of a parable'. Bultmann, The History of the Synoptic Tradition (p. 230-1), observes that this story has frequently been said to have grown out of a parable, - though 'Such an origin is hardly possible with any other miracle stories'.

However, we are faced with Mark's belief that the tree was dead by the next morning. Derrett, like Hiers, seeks for an historical basis in Jesus' confrontation with a specific tree, using it to make his own point about a number of Scriptural themes. Jesus would be 'deliberately miming biblical actions'[33] and we should have 'a readiness to see traces of history'. Once again, Jesus was referring to the end arriving so rapidly that the tree would be incapable of bearing before the event, though, 'talking to trees which strikes us as absurd is to be found in contexts familiar to Jews of the period'.[34] *

But Derrett raises a number of central points. He stresses the 'For it was not the time', and the reference to Jesus' hunger. They contribute to the set of conditions forming the haggadic context of the Messiah's search for figs.

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* Reading the Haggadic literature to which Derrett refers, 'The Scaffold of Haman', 'The Trees of the Garden of Eden', and the stories about the talking grapes of the Messianic Era, they seem to be much more readily apportioned to a different kind of reality altogether. 'The Scaffold of Haman' struck me as being an early kind of 'matinee' story, in which the villains get their deserts and the 'goodies' win, with a lot of scabrous humour at the 'baddies' expense thrown in between. One significant point concerns the fact that all the different trees speak up and say 'I am a symbol of Israel'. But in so many ways, this is what we would call a 'tall story'. See L. Ginzberg, Legends of the Jews, Vols. I, IV, V, (Philadelphia, Jewish Publishing Society of America, 1954). The story of the Rabbi's son who made the fig tree yield out of season is significantly different in many ways. The Rabbi in fact curses the son for his deed, despite his excellent, charitable motives, and the story exhibits, if anything, anti-miracle polemic (Ta'anith - 'fasts', 24a; Soncino, p. 122). In this sense, Bultmann's reference to this story (The History of the Synoptic Tradition, p. 234) is too neutral. He also cites the story in which Rabbi Eliezer uproots a carob tree to prove the correctness of his interpretation of a point of law (p. 235) - again, as I understand it, his fellows disallowed the appeal to miracle. Morton Smith's criticisms of Fiebig's Jüdische Wundergeschichten des neutestamentlichen Zeitalters are of interest at this point. Morton Smith, Tannaitic Parallels to the Gospels, pp. 81-4.
J. Neusner, Early Rabbinic Judaism, p. 122, also stresses the differences between Jesus' miracles and rabbinic miracle traditions from a comparable time. 'Except for Honi's rainmaking, all the Rabbinic nature miracles referred to by Bultmann (pp. 234ff) pertain to later masters. We may safely conclude that this type of narrative constitutes an inconsequential part of the Pharisaic-Rabbinic tradition; the particular literary traits associated with it in the Gospels are absent.'

> If it is the season for figs, the crop is not that of which haggadah speaks. Hence such fruits must be looked for by one who is (1) hungry, (2) righteous, (3) applying out of season, (4) entering the New Age. Speaking in haggadic terms, why did not the fig tree produce immediate figs, like the tree to which the pious employer's son spoke in the Talmud? Obviously because the Age had not commenced. But had it not? This might be a matter of opinion. If other signs signified that the Age had commenced the tree was wrong. Trees adopted attitudes at the time of Adam, and here was a tree adopting an attitude towards the Messiah.[35]

Derrett seems to believe that something relatively wonderful did happen in the time between Jesus addressing the tree and its discovery in a withered state. He refers to an unseasonal shrivelling, even dropping of leaves, but again sees that Peter was somewhat mistaken in understanding Jesus to have cursed the tree. Rather,

> Jesus does not say that the withering was due to his sentence. The story as told by St. Mark leaves it open for us to believe that Jesus accepted this as God's confirmation the tree would remain dormant until the Age matured.[36]

It seems to me, however, that Mark shares Peter's apprehension of the incident, and that the tree, far from remaining 'dormant', is put forward as 'having been withered from the roots' (v. 20) - quite a different matter altogether. Derrett's final understanding of the story is that it

> evokes the idea that Jesus searched for signs of the Age, and failed to find them, not because he was wrong but because the 'figtree' was wrong. From this his students must learn that if they have faith in prayer they will be God's crop, and, correspondingly, as he can come confidently to them in search of 'figs' they will, in the Age already, confidently find figs from every fig tree whatever the season.[37]

Bultmann (History, p. 235) referred to the distant parallel in the 'law-miracle' of Rabbi Eliezer. G. Theissen calls the fig tree incident a 'rule miracle', writing

> More numerous than rule miracles of reward are rule miracles of punishment. In enforcing rules, both ancients and moderns rely more on fear of punishment than on encouragement through praise. It is therefore all the more noticeable that punishment miracles are almost entirely absent from the New Testament. The only example is the story of Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5:1-11), in which a condemnation is confirmed by a miracle. The proximity to the divine ruling is again unmistakable. The story of the withered fig tree (Mark 11:12-14, 20-1) may also be treated as a punishment miracle, even if it remains a mystery what rule the fig tree is supposed to have broken.[38]

B. Gerhardsson doubts that this is correct. The notion of the tree being punished is quite absent from the story.[39] While its original purpose was to show that judgement will fall on those who

bear no fruit to God at the time of visitation, now, its purpose is to show that he who

> has faith and has no doubts can do such mighty acts, and even move mountains with his word alone . . . the Christological (and eschatological) significance has been pushed into the background in favour of an interpretation indicating the possibilities of the followers if they only have faith.[40]

One feels that Gerhardsson has been overcome by the oddity of the incidents in question, by concluding

> The fact that this bold instruction is linked to such a paltry example as the withering of a fig tree shows to what an extent the two evangelists are bound to tradition. Had they felt free to invent, they would merely have had Jesus move the Mount of Olives or perform some other action of similar dimensions.[41]

Reference to moving the mountain suggests an unmistakable motif from the Old Testament.* Mark has not given a general reference to disciples' power to move mountains. The reference is to this mountain of the Messiah.[42] Is Jesus then saying that for those with faith, the Messianic Age and the time of God's visitation begins now - but that the Lord's 'fighting for' Israel by no means includes the preservation of the Temple. In fact,

> The Temple, known to the Jewish people as 'the mountain of the house' or 'this mountain' was not to be elevated, as expected, but cast down. As R. E. Dowda states: 'The temple is the mountainous obstacle which is to vanish before the faith of the gospel movement. The temple system, with its corrupt clericalism and vested interests, is to be removed in the eschatological era, which is now being experienced.'[43]

Telford leaves little doubt as to the effect of the story on a Markan audience. They will see that a solemn judgement, prefigured

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*R. M. Grant, Miracle and Natural Law in Graeco-Roman and Early Christian Thought (North Hollard Publishing Co. 1952), p. 169 refers to apocalyptic eschatology and its theme of the fate of Israel and her enemies in the New Age. Thus 'the cursing of the fig tree is probably based on the expectation of a period of miraculous fruitfulness in the last days' and the mountain to be moved is probably the Mount of Olives whose movement 'in that day' is indicated in Zechariah 14:4. See W. Telford, The Barren Temple and The Withered Tree, p. 161.

in the prophets, is enacted against a corrupt Temple cultus,* and a profound reversal of any Messianic expectations for Israel - intimated by this miracle and taking place in Mark's own day.

Telford insists that 'the fig tree story in Mark's Gospel was intended at the Marcan level to be understood both literally and symbolically and, indeed, would have been so understood'.[44]

> For Mark and his readers the scenario had already been written in the pages of the Old Testament, and in their actual experience Jerusalem and the Temple had, in 70 CE, been utterly destroyed! God's plant, Israel, had been withered. Within the very lifetime of Jesus himself, the promised curse had commenced (11:14) and only after a short delay (11:20-21) was its efficacy perceived. 'This mountain' which was to be elevated in the Messianic Age, was in fact to be uprooted and cast into the sea! For the Marcan reader the cursing of the fig tree was an eschatological sign prefiguring the destruction of Jerusalem and its Temple. For Mark, it was a commentary upon his own Time.[45]

By the time of Mark's Gospel the Romans are, are about to, or just have, moved against Jerusalem with remorseless might. Will the Lord come to her aid and fight against Israel's foes? No. Her heritage has passed, with Jesus himself, out of empirical Israel, and belongs to those who <u>with</u> the Roman centurion, acknowledge <u>him</u> as the Son of God. If one looks for a Temple now, and the blessing of the God who preserves it, defends it and is offered acceptable worship by it, it is found outside Israel, in the community gathered around Jesus.[46]

To return to our chapter question, and offer something of a concise answer. A Jesus who knows his identity and goal, and works miracles (some on a stupendous scale), who yet does not evoke an identificatory response from those closest to him (and even by

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* C. H. Dodd, <u>History and the Gospel</u> (London: Nisbet and Co. Ltd. 1938), p. 136, on Jesus' perception of the coming actions of Rome. 'The rejection of Israel was not an eschatological <u>theologumenon</u>, it was an historical reality which would embody itself in events. See also J. Neusner, <u>Early Rabbinic Judaism, Historical Studies in Religion, Literature and Art</u>, chapter two, 'Four Responses to the Destruction of the Second Temple', pp. 35-49. Most significant is his depiction of the very different attitudes to the Temple that existed within Judaism prior to A.D. 70. Thus, its destruction would have meant different things - to those for whom the synagogue worship was complete, for those at Qumran, for those at Leontopolis with their own Temple. Its significance in this part of Mark might then suggest a potential audience for whom the Temple still had, but ought not to have, such a prominent place.

16:8 they have no inkling of the announced goal; Resurrection) - this, for me, constitutes the greatest obstacle arising from Mark for locating Jesus' miracles as events in history. It is in their failure to affect the disciples that the greatest obstacle to their literal historicity lies. I cannot imagine ordinary people in anything like a history, remaining as untouched by miracle of this scale, as are the disciples in Mark. If we try to recover a history in which we credit the disciples with a more comprehending, less problematic response, it seems to me that we have already substituted something else for what Mark itself seems to say. This, of course, does not question the fact that Jesus undoubtedly worked relatively wonderful deeds, of the kind referred to in chapter one of this thesis.

Thus, Mark itself, while containing some of the very miracles in whose historicity we are interested, also contains features that raise telling objections to the belief that Jesus really did these things. These objections are not countered by adhering to a world-view taken from Aquinas, Newman or Lewis that can accommodate the greatest wonders, and increases the likelihood of a Straussian or Bultmannian resolution of the miracle stories being correct in fundamental respects. I remain impressed with the similar features in the raising-the-dead tradition in the Gospels and in the accounts of Xavier's activity (pp. 219-21). Setting aside dogmatic appeals to a Word of God, there is every reason to suppose that what happened in Xavier's case is in fact typical; rather than even beginning to plead that Mark could, plausibly, have not known about a literal Lazarus incident, or declined to mention it. There is room for further study on the transmission process and changing fortunes of the greatest of Xavier's miracles, drawing out the parallels with Gospel traditions.

A COMPENDIUM OF CONCLUSIONS

Throughout this thesis, I have attempted to remain assiduously fair and impartial in my handling of the material drawn from those who believe and those who do not believe in the occurrence of Jesus' miracles. I have also attempted to cover the complex issues connected with adopting or maintaining different world-views as these interact with the interpretation of Gospel miracle stories. This slow, and perhaps cumbersome method of proceeding has seemed to me to be the best way of responding to the possibility, very much a part of our tradition of inquiry, that Jesus could have, and did in fact do the greatest of miracles. It will not hurt to state clearly, even at this late stage, that it has not been my principal intention to provide a definitive interpretation of a Gospel nor, necessarily, to be totally comprehensive on any one miracle story. In that sense, the first part of my thesis title is meant with a very precise sense, and the eight chapters combine to give my answer to that question.

I have remained alive to the possibility that he was as miraculous as Aquinas considered him to be, or as miraculous as some simple amalgamations of the Gospels would make him, though in the end, I conclude that we do best to be somewhat more restrained in our use of miracle to depict something of Jesus in his historical reality.

My personal attempt to answer the question raised by the level of Jesus' miraculous activity has taken the form of a careful investigation of what greater minds than my own have believed. In this process, I believe that I have provided new insights into what belief in miracle involves, and answered my thesis question in a way that should prove accessible to others who are also perplexed by these strange 'events'. This should be so, whether or not they begin with belief in the occurrence of miracles. Perhaps some of the impartiality, if not, at times, the apparent slowness with which the argument has moved forward, has been due to the fact that I have remained open to the force

of the thesis question throughout my study. I can say here, though, that in the process of this research I have changed my own mind over what I believe about Jesus in his miracles, and have adjusted to a somewhat more modest picture of him as a miracle worker.

I believe that I have comprehensively answered my thesis question. Prior to the Resurrection, Jesus' miracles would not have raised him above the level of enigma or ambiguous sign, even to those closest to him. They would not have been of a level sufficient to disclose his Resurrection-purpose and identity in advance, about which, I suspect, he knew little if anything. Had, in reality, his miraculous activity been as great as that contained in anything like an amalgamation of the Gospel miracle stories, it seems to me that all enigma must have been dispensed with and the twelve been simply and effectively informed of the somewhat miraculous Resurrection to come - which they should then have waited for quite eagerly, even going to the first Easter in an unperturbed manner (p. 8). By believing in the occurrence of Jesus' <u>great</u> miracles, it seems to me that we would be obliged to consider them as of such magnitude that Resurrection could not remain as the startling <u>reversal</u> that it undoubtedly was - the more so if Jesus and his disciples actually discussed his miracles and their significance (p. 225).

In turning to Aquinas' beliefs about miracle, I had hoped to establish a framework that in fact made it legitimate to establish the position that Jesus' miracles did occur as depicted - like C. S. Lewis on a grander scale. As it turns out, Aquinas has proved instrumental in bringing about my change of mind, though his maximal depiction of miracles from conception to Ascension remains of the greatest significance. I see the moon-miracle as an ideal example with which to test half-formed ideas or even strongly-felt presumptions with which a student might begin his study of the Gospel miracles. It presents the challenge, that if you do believe in the occurrence of miracles of the first order, then you in fact have a capacity to accept almost anything, given half-reasonable testimony.

It is not my intention, at this point, to recover all the particular points about specific miracle stories that have been covered in chapters I - VIII. They are perfectly accessible

there. I would, however, say that I remain unconvinced by the rather axiomatic objections to miracles found in Hume, Strauss and Bultmann. In particular, were there to be a miracle like the revival of Queen Elizabeth, where the evidence was of the best calibre, I would probably find myself inclined to accept it. It is, rather, on issues that arise internal to the Gospels, and in making sense of them as histories leading up to a Resurrection that the greatest problems with belief in miracle are found. It is in this context that Strauss' and Bultmann's specific, detailed interpretations, or something like them, become rather more likely.

I remain convinced of the value of comparing Strauss and Newman on the same subject. We can see that many of Strauss' particular observations are of a kind that Newman could digest only with difficulty - even as insolubles that he coped with by means of an appeal to Scripture as a Word of God. In some respects, modern Catholic and Anglican interpretation of the Gospels owes more to Strauss than it does to Newman, no matter how much the latter is followed in other ways.

All things considered, we do best to approach the Gospel miracles with an historiographical outlook that can readily adjust to a re-drawing of the limits of Jesus in his miracles at a somewhat more modest level.

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CHAPTER II

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[50]Ibid.

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[52]Ibid., p. 131.

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[54]We would tend, I think, to consider this movement of the moon as all but axiomatically impossible, and not merely empirically unlikely.

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CHAPTER III

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[120]A. J. Boekraad and Henry Tristram, The Argument from Conscience to the Existence of God (Louvain: Nauwelaerts, 1961), p. 35.

[121]Newman, 'An Internal Argument', p. 385. Newman cites Seeley on the woman taken in adultery, where he interprets Jesus stooping to draw in the dust, 'In his burning embarrassment and confusion . . . He stooped down to hide His face'. See also p. 382, on the 'agitation of mind' suffered by Jesus from time to time.

[122]W. Wrede, The Messianic Secret, trans. J. C. G. Greig (Cambridge and London: James Clarke and Co. Ltd., 1971), p. 6. 'The scientific study of the life of Jesus is suffering from psychological "suppositionitis" which amounts to a sort of historical guesswork.'

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[4]p. 120.	[5]p. 112.	[6]p. 143.
[7]p. 141.	[8]p. 142.	[9]p. 175
[10]p. 32.	[11]p. 47.	[12]p. 114.
[13]Ibid.	[14]p. 115.	[15]p. 142
[16]p. 148.	[17]pp. 147-8.	[18]p. 148
[19]p. 149.	[20]p. 151.	[21]p. 148.
[22]p. 151.	[23]p. 152	[24]p. 157.
[25]p.112.	[26]p. 148.	[27]p. 152.
[28]Ibid.	[29]p. 153	[30]p. 159

[31] Ibid. [32] Ibid. [33] p. 160.
[34] Ibid. [35] Ibid.
[36] Immanuel Kant's Critique of Pure Reason, trans. Norman Kemp Smith (London & Basingstoke: The Macmillan Press Ltd., 1982), p. 68.
[37] p. 162. [38] p. 127. [39] pp. 171-2.
[40] p. 138. [41] p. 139. [42] p. 140.
[43] Ibid. [44] Ibid. [45] pp. 140-1.
[46] p. 143. [47] pp. 143-4. [48] p. 144.
[49] p. 145. [50] Ibid. [51] p. 154.
[52] Ibid. [53] Ibid. [54] p. 155.
[55] p. 125. [56] p. 144. [57] p. 145.
[58] p. 168. [59] n., pp. 137-8 [60] p. 18.

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[1] X. I. 90, pp. 114-5. [2] X. II. 99, pp. 128-9.
[3] X. I. 90, n. 1, p. 115. [4] X. II. 96, pp. 122-3.
[5] Ibid., p. 122. [6] Ibid., p. 123.
[7] Ibid. [8] X. II. 96, p. 124.
[9] Ibid. [10] X. II. 96, p. 125, n. 1, (pp. 344-6).
[11] X. II. 96, p. 125. [12] X. II. 100, p. 130.
[13] X. II. 101, p. 131. [14] X. I. 87-90, pp. 110-15.
[15] X. I. 87, p. 110. [16] Ibid.
[17] Ibid. [18] X. I. 88, p. 111.
[19] Ibid. [20] X. I. 89, p. 112.
[21] X. I. 89, p. 113. [22] Ibid.
[23] X. I. 89, p. 113. [24] X. I. 89, pp. 113-4.
[25] X. II. 99, pp. 127-8 [26] X. II. 99, p. 128.
[27] Ibid. [28] X. I. 88, p. 112.
[29] X. I. 90, p. 114. [30] Ibid.
[31] Ibid. [32] X. I. 90, p. 115.
[33] X. II. 99, p. 128.
[34] J. C. A. Gaskin, Hume's Philosophy of Religion (London and Basingstoke: The Macmillan Press Ltd., 1978), pp. 108, 125. R. M. Burns, The Great Debate on Miracles: From Joseph Glanvill to David Hume (Lewisberg: Bucknell University Press, 1981), pp. 150-1, 171.

[35]X. II. 99, pp. 128-9. [36]X. II. 99, p. 129.

[37]J. C. A. Gaskin, Hume's Philosophy of Religion, p. 125.

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[2]Albert Schweitzer, The Quest of the Historical Jesus: A Critical Study of Its Progress from Reimarus to Wrede, trans. W. Montgomery with a preface by F. C. Burkitt (London: Adam & Charles Black, 1910), p. 78.

[3]Hans-Herbert Stoldt, History and Criticism of the Marcan Hypothesis, trans. and ed. Donald L. Niewyk with an introduction by William R. Farmer, (Macon, Georgia: Mercer University Press, 1980), p. 227.

[4]D. F. Strauss, The Life of Jesus, pp. 779-80.

[5]A. Schweitzer, The Quest, pp. 3-4.

[6]D. F. Strauss, The Life of Jesus, pp. 778.

[7]p. 764. [8]p. 130. [9]p. 132.
[10]pp. 291-3. [11]p. 130. [12]p. 140.
[13]p. 122. [14]p. 124. [15]pp. 125-6.
[16]p. 119. [17]p. 121. [18]p. 145.
[19]p. 148. [20]p. 130. [21]p. 131.
[22]Ibid. [23]p. 141. [24]Ibid.
[25]pp. 96,98. [26]p. 39. [27]pp. 74-5.
[28]p. 78. [29]pp. 79-80. [30]p. 80.
[31]p. 86. [32]Ibid. [33]p. 87.
[34]p. 88. [35]p. 166. [36]Ibid.
[37]p. 168. [38]pp. 173-4. [39]p. 175.
[40]p. 691. [41]p. 692. [42]p. 416.
[43]p. 419. [44]p. 421. [45]p. 422.
[46]p. 423. [47]p.424. [48]p. 426.
[49]p. 427. [50]pp. 427-8. [51]p. 428.
[52]p. 429. [53]p. 430. [54]p. 431.
[55]Ibid. [56]p. 435. [57]p. 436.
[58]pp. 517-8. [59]p. 508. [60]p. 511.
[61]pp. 511-2. [62]p. 512. [63]Ibid.
[64]p. 508. [65]p. 510. [66]p. 512.
[67]pp. 512-3. [68]p. 513. [69]p. 519.

[70]p. 516. [71]p. 517. [72]Ibid.
[73]p. 519. [74]p. 498. [75]Ibid.
[76]p. 499. [77]p. 496. [78]Ibid.
[79]p. 497. [80]Ibid. [81]p. 499.
[82]p. 501. [83]pp. 500-2. [84]pp. 501-2.
[85]p. 502. [86]p. 501. [87]p. 503.
[88]p. 485-6. [89]p. 486. [90]Ibid.
[91]p. 487. [92]p. 488. [93]p. 490.
[94]p. 491. [95]p. 492. [96]p. 494.
[97]p. 495. [98]p. 713. [99]p. 718.
[100]p. 734-5. [101]p. 735. [102]Ibid.
[103]p. 742. [104]Ibid. [105]p. 743.
[106]p. 744. [107]p. 750. [108]p. 751.
[109]p. 750. [110]pp. 750-1. [111]pp. 754-5.
[112]p. 755. [113]Ibid.

CHAPTER VII

[1]Rudolf Bultmann, The History of the Synoptic Tradition, trans. John Marsh (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1972), p. 291.

[2]Ibid., p. 292.

[3]Ibid., pp. 291-2.

[4]Ibid., n. 4, p. 291.

[5]Ibid., pp. 295-6, 304.

[6]Ibid., p. 292.

[7]Ibid., n. 1, p. 293.

[8]R. Bultmann, Primitive Christianity in its Contemporary Setting, trans. R. H. Fuller (Edinburgh: Collins, The Fontana Library, 1962), pp. 176-7.

[9]Ibid., p. 181.

[10]R. Bultmann, History, pp. 273-4.

[11]Ibid., p. 285; cf. J. Wenham, The Easter Enigma: Do the Resurrection stories contradict one another? (Exeter: Paternoster Press, 1984) for an ultra-conservative response to the longer ending in Mark, reconciled with the other three Gospels as accounts of the literal happenings of the first Easter.

[12]R. Bultmann, Theology of the New Testament, Vol. I, trans. Kendrick Grobel (London: S. C. M. Press Ltd., 1968, p. 45).

[13]R. Bultmann, History, p. 286.

[14]Ibid.

[15]R. Bultmann, Theology, p. 45.

[16]R. Bultmann, History, p. 287

[17]Ibid., p. 289.

[18]Ibid.

[19]Ibid., p. 290.

[20]R. Bultmann, The Gospel of John: A Commentary, trans. G. R. Beasley-Murray (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1971), p. 696.

[21]Ibid.

[22]Ibid.

[23]R. Bultmann, History, p. 11.

[24]Ibid., pp. 14-15.

[25]Ibid., p. 15

[26]Ibid., pp. 15-16.

[27]Ibid., citing A. Schlatter, Der Evangelist Matthaeus, p. 301.

[28]Ibid., p. 12.

[29]Ibid., p. 209.

[30]Ibid., pp. 221-31.

[31]Ibid., p. 226.

[32]Ibid., p. 214.

[33]Ibid.

[34]I believe it would be a mistake to use the theory of stories becoming attached to people as a tool for complete historical scepticism. It need not be another example of the story attaching itself to someone when Martin, in the fourth century, is credited with the same kind of cure. (C. Stancliffe, St. Martin and His Hagiographer, p. 366, citing Sulpicius Severus, Dialogi III, 9, 3). We might in fact find that the healings have a high degree of historical likelihood, without us reverting to the notion of magical transference of power, or dismissing the belief that God has acted by adopting a purely subjectivist model of healing.

[35]As examples of the motif 'length of sickness', Bultmann lists Mk. 5:25 (12 years), 9:21 (from childhood), Lk. 13:11 (18 years), Acts 3:2 (from birth), 4:22 (the man's age, more than 40), 9:33 (bedridden 8 years), 14:8 (cripple from birth), Jn. 9:1 (blind from birth). Bultmann makes no distinction between these details and motifs from other, 'equivalent' sources. The point seems to be, that we are not being given remembered detail from actual incidents, but features typical to healing stories. R. Bultmann, History, p. 221.

[36]R. Bultmann, History, p. 221.

[37]Bultmann refers to the 'primitive idea of a transference of power (History, p. 222). As examples, he gives Mk. 6:56, 'the fringe of his garment', Mt. 14:36, Acts 5:15 Peter's shadow, 19:12 Paul's handkerchiefs and aprons. J. M. Hull discusses this extensively in Hellenistic Magic and The Synoptic Tradition (London: S. C. M. Press Ltd., 1974), pp. 105-15, basing many of his conclusions on F. Preisigke, Die Gotteskraft der Früchristlichen Zeit (1922). The following summary of Preisigke's conclusions (Hull, pp. 109-10) is of some interest.

'1. The woman seeks healing only. She has not the slightest interest in personal contact with Jesus.
2. She knows that this healing power is available quite independently of Christ's personality or of his will - it is enough, she knows, to touch his garment.

3. This is popular knowledge; the woman has no secret information. The evangelist himself shares this popular knowledge and attitude.
4. Christ also shares this popular knowledge of the impersonal nature of his power. Although he knows power has gone he does not know to whom it has gone..
5. Christ is thus not in control of the power. The power has its own controls.
6. Any determined touch makes the power overflow like electricity.
7. Christ is no more than the bearer, the vessel of this power. A vessel is necessary to the power . . . But only certain persons can carry such high tension, else why should the woman have come to Christ?
8. The power is in the garment as well as in the body; Christ has not willed to fill the garment with power; his will is not an issue. Touching unites the lifeless matter and the living body of Christ in one unity of power; the living woman is also united in the same unity.
9. Christ notices not the incident nor the touching but the diminution of power in his own body.
10. The touch must however be (i) deliberate, (ii) with faith.
11. The truth is not in Christ's mission, nor in him as salvation bringer in the Christian sense, for then the request would have been to the person of Christ, not to his garment. The faith is in the power. What the woman wants is the power, not the Christ; the water, not the fireman.
12. Christ does not find the woman's attitude or behavior blameworthy; indeed he blesses her.
13. Since Christ does not will it and nevertheless only a touch of faith secures the response, the question arises as to whether the power itself has a self-consciousness. The power is probably looked upon as living and as the servant of the one who summons it with deliberate knowledge of its presence.'

[38]R. Bultmann, History, pp. 214, 221.

[39]Ibid., p. 215. 'D' is the uncial manuscript Bezae Cantabrigiensis (Gospels and Acts), dated to the 6th century.

[40]G. Theissen, The Miracle Stories of the Early Christian Tradition, p. 56.

[41]R. Bultmann, History, p. 222.

[42]J. M. Hull, Hellenistic Magic, pp. 136-7, 139.

[43]R. Bultmann, History, p. 215.

[44]Ibid., p. 221.

[45]See Chapter VIII, n., p. 219 below, for a discussion of some 'near-death' miracles attributed to Christian saints.

[46]F. W. Beare, The Earliest Records of Jesus, p. 121.

[47]R. Bultmann, History, p. 215.

[48]R. Bultmann, John, p. 405.

[49]Ibid., p. 402.

[50]Ibid., p. 404.

[51]Ibid., n. 1, p. 396.

[52]Ibid., p. 119, and n. 2.

[53]R. Bultmann, History, p. 228.

[54]Ibid., p. 213.

[55]Ibid., p. 33.

[56]Ibid., p. 217.

[57]J. R. R. Tolkien, 'On Fairy Stories' in Tree and Leaf, Smith of Wootton Major, and The Homecoming of Beorhtnoth (London: Unwin Paperbacks 1979), pp. 32-3. Tolkien discusses Arthur's emergence from the obscurity of history to his reign as a king of 'Faërie', and a story told of Charlemagne's mother that turns out to be widespread, and not tied down to one specific, historical character. Bultmann, History, pp. 228-9 is saying, precisely, that this process or feature applies to stories that become attached to Jesus. Given the independent identification of this process, it would be very difficult to deny its application, in part, to him.

[58]R. Bultmann, History, p. 229.

[59]Ibid.

[60]Ibid., p. 230.

[61]Ibid.

[62]Ibid., p. 231.

[63]Ibid., p. 240.

[64]R. Bultmann, History, p. 241, 'The mythological light in which Jesus is set by Mark (cp. Dibelius, Formgeschichte, p. 87) is there for the most part on the author's own account but also on account of his material, and especially of the miracle stories. But this distinction between Mark and Q means that in Q the picture of Jesus is made essentially from the material of the Palestinian tradition, while in Mark and most of all in his miracle stories Hellenism has made a vital contribution.'

On the god-man or divine-man notion, see T. J. Weeden, 'The Heresy That Necessitated Mark's Gospel', Z. N. W. 59, 1968, pp. 145-58, in which Mark is said to be written to combat a θεῖος ἀνήρ christology threatening his community - against which his own theology of the cross is promoted. 'Mark has cast the disciples as advocates of a θεῖος ἀνήρ christology which is pitted against the suffering Messiahship of Jesus. Since there is no historical basis for a dispute of this nature having taken place between Jesus and the disciples, the only conclusion possible is that the Sitz im Leben for this dispute is Mark's own community and that Mark has intentionally staged the dispute in his Gospel . . . ' (p. 150). Bultmann's distinction is developed and applied by L. E. Keck, 'Mark 3:7-12 and Mark's Christology', J. B. L. 84, 1965, pp. 341-58. Of Mk. 3:7-12, 4:35 - 5:43, 6:31-52 and 6:53-56, he writes, '. . . all these stories tell of miracles that result from the supernatural power resident within Jesus . . . these miracles have no stated connection with the kingdom of God, or with the forgiveness of sins. They are direct manifestations of the Son of God, and in a particular way - the θεῖος ἀνήρ. . . . Mark contains two streams of miracle material: one closely related to the Palestinian scene and the message of Jesus in its native setting; the other relatively unrelated to Jesus' 'message'. (pp. 349-50). Keck refers to a basic Palestinian/Hellenistic, 'strong man'/θεῖος ἀνήρ division in Mark's material. To the contrary, see T. A. Burkill, 'Mark 3:7-12 and the Alleged Dualism in the Evangelist's Miracle

Material', J. B. L. 87, 1968, pp. 409-17. P. J. Achtemeier, 'The Origin and Function of the Pre-Marcan Miracle Catenae', J. B. L. 91, 1972, pp. 198-221, applies the θεῖος ἀνήρ notion to miracle material formed and used in an epiphanic eucharist, with parallels to Paul's opponents in Corinth (pp. 198, 209).

More recently, Howard Clark Kee, Miracle in the Early Christian World, p. 37 and n. 88 has rejected attempts to apply, uniformly, a divine-man model to account for features of the Gospel miracle tradition.

[65]R. Bultmann, 'The Question of Wonder', in Faith and Understanding Vol. I, ed. Robert W. Funk, trans. Louise Pettibone Smith (London: S. C. M. Press Ltd.) p. 260.

[66]R. Bultmann, 'The Case for Demythologization', in Karl Jasper and Rudolf Bultmann, Myth and Christianity: An inquiry into the possibility of religion without myth (New York: Noonday Press Inc., 1958) p. 69.

[67]Ibid., pp. 69-70.

[68]R. Bultmann, 'What does it mean to speak of God?', in Faith and Understanding, Vol. I, pp. 60-61. See also, the reference to 'Heidegger's existentialist analysis of the ontological structure of being' and its concurrence with the message of the New Testament, 'New Testament and Mythology' in H. W. Bartsch, ed., R. H. Fuller, trans., Kerygma and Myth: A Theological Debate, Vol. I (London: S. P. C. K., 2nd ed., 1964) pp. 24-25.

[69]R. Bultmann, Jesus and the Word, trans. Louise Pettibone Smith and Erminie Huntress Lantero (London and Glasgow: Collins, Fontana Books, 1958), p. 126.

[70]Ibid., p. 150.

[71]R. Bultmann, 'New Testament and Mythology', pp. 25-6.

[72]R. Bultmann, 'The Case For Demythologization', p. 69.

[73]R. Bultmann, 'The Question of Wonder', p. 253.

[74]R. Bultmann, 'New Testament and Mythology', pp. 39-40.

[75]Ibid., p. 39.

[76]R. Bultmann, 'The Question of Wonder', pp. 247-8.

[77]R. Bultmann, 'Is Exegesis Without Presuppositions Possible?', in Existence and Faith: Shorter Writings of Rudolf Bultmann, trans. and intro. Schubert M. Ogden (London and Glasgow: Collins, The Fontana Library, 1964), p. 345.

[78]Ibid.

[79]R. Bultmann, 'New Testament and Mythology', p. 39. See also, 'The Case for Demythologization', p. 60.

[80]R. Bultmann, 'New Testament and Mythology', p. 5.

[81]R. Bultmann, 'The Question of Wonder', p. 249.

[82]Ibid., p. 261.

CHAPTER VIII

[1]On the importance of Resurrection for Mark, see E. Best, Mark: The Gospel as Story (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1983),

Chapters XII and XX. 'He has no resurrection appearances because Christ is present throughout the whole Gospel as the one who cares' (p. 137). See p. 73 for Mark's knowledge of Resurrection appearances.

[2]C. E. B. Cranfield, The Gospel According to St. Mark, p. 87, and Vincent Taylor, The Gospel According to St. Mark: The Greek Text with Introduction, Notes and Indexes (London: Macmillan & Co. Ltd. 1953), p. 181, both refer to Jeremias on a semitic, inclusive sense for 'many' at this point.

[3]Morna D. Hooker, The Message of Mark (London: Epworth Press, 1983), p. 38, suggests 6,000 demons could be meant. This would give a ratio of 3 demons per pig! In the fourth century, St. Martin was confronted with one demon on the back of a berserk cow (C. Stancliffe, St. Martin and His Hagiographer, p. 368), which, as far as the cow is concerned, is more conceivable.

[4]E. Best, Mark: The Gospel as Story, p. 49. '. . . his primary stress in the way he uses the feeding is not on the meal as representative of the eucharist, but on food as symbolising the teaching which Jesus gives; the Twelve are those who pass on this teaching.'

[5]Gerd Theissen, The Miracle Stories of The Early Christian Tradition, p. 215.

[6]Quentin Quesnell, The Mind of Mark: Interpretation and Method through the Exegesis of Mark 6:52 (Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1969) p. 63.

[7]Robert M. Fowler, Loaves and Fishes: The Function of the Feeding Stories in the Gospel of Mark, Society of Biblical Literature Dissertation Series No. 54 (Chico, California: Scholars Press, 1981), p. 148.

[8]Ibid., p. 147.

[9]Ibid., p. 181.

[10]G. Prevost, trans., The Homilies of S. John Chrysostom on the Gospel of St. Matthew, Part III (Oxford: J. H. Parker; London: F. and J. Rivington, 1851), p. 903.

[11]D. F. Strauss, The Life of Jesus, p. 528.

[12]Ibid., p. 529.

[13]Ibid.

[14]E. Best, Following Jesus: Discipleship in the Gospel of Mark, Journal for the study of the New Testament, supplementary series 4 (Sheffield: J. S. O. T., 1981), n. 7, pp. 10-11.

[15]H. van der Loos, The Miracles of Jesus, p. 694.

[16]Ibid., p. 696.

[17]W. L. Lane, The Gospel According to Mark, The English text with introduction, exposition and notes (London: Marshall, Morgan & Scott, 1974), p. 400.

[18]Ibid., p. 401

[19]W. Barclay, And He Had Compassion on Them: A Handbook on the Miracles of the Bible (Edinburgh: Church of Scotland Youth Committee, 1959) p. 132.

[20]Ibid., pp. 137-8. Also, A. M. Hunter, The Gospel According to Saint Mark: Introduction and Commentary (London: S.C.M. Press Ltd. 1959), p. 110. Jesus used a tree to tell a parable, just as he used

children to symbolize the Kingdom. Later, however, the tree happened (!) to die.

[21]W. Barclay, The Mind of Jesus, p. 69.

[22]D. F. Strauss, The Life of Jesus, p. 532.

[23]On the moral objection, see also, D. E. Nineham, The Gospel of St. Mark, The Pelican Gospel Commentaries (Penguin Books, 1967), p. 299, referring to W. E. Bundy, Jesus and the First Three Gospels. '. . . the fundamental objection to the historicity of the story, which is that the action ascribed to Jesus seems completely out of character. 'It is irrational and revolting . . . and lacks any sort of moral motive or justification.'

[24]E. P. Gould, A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to St. Mark, I. C. C. (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1896), p. 211.

[25]W. R. Telford, The Barren Temple and the Withered Tree: a redaction-critical analysis of the cursing of the fig-tree pericope in Mark's Gospel and its relation to the cleansing of the Temple tradition, Journal for the study of the New Testament, supplementary series I (Sheffield: J. S. O. T. Press, 1980), p. 9.

[26]Ibid., p. 25.

[27]Edward Schillebeeckx, Jesus: An Experiment in Christology, trans. Hubert Hoskins (London: Collins Fount Paperbacks, 1983), p. 181.

[28]E. Schweizer, The Good News According to Mark: A Commentary on the Gospel, trans. D. H. Madvig (London: S. P. C. K., 1971), p. 231.

[29]D. F. Strauss, The Life of Jesus, p. 534.

[30]J. Jeremias, New Testament Theology, Vol. I, p. 87.

[31]R. H. Hiers, 'Not the Season for Figs', Journal of Biblical Literature, LXXVII, 1968, p. 395.

[32]Ibid., p. 398.

[33]J. Duncan M. Derrett, 'Fig Trees in the New Testament', in Studies in The New Testament, Vol. II, Midrash in Action and as a Literary Device (Leiden, E. J. Brill, 1978), p. 150.

[34]Ibid., p. 151.

[35]Ibid., p. 153.

[36]Ibid.

[37]Ibid., pp. 156-7.

[38]Gerd Theissen, The Miracle Stories of the Early Christian Tradition, p. 109.

[39]Birger Gerhardsson, The Mighty Acts of Jesus According to Matthew, trans. R. Dewsnap (Lund: C. W. K. Gleerup, 1979) p. 58.

[40]Ibid., p. 59.

[41]Ibid.

[42]W. R. Telford The Barren Temple and the Withered Tree, p. 58.

[43]Ibid., p. 119, citing R. E. Dowda, The Cleansing of the Temple in the Synoptic Gospels, Dissertation for Duke University 1972.

[44]Ibid., p. 205.

[45]Ibid., p. 163. See also, J. Bowman, The Gospel of Mark

The New Christian-Jewish Passover Haggadah (Leiden, E. J. Brill, 1965), pp. 221-2.

[46]E. Best, 'The Miracles in Mark' Review and Expositor: A Baptist Theological Journal LXXV, No. 4, 1978, p. 544. '. . . because there is no fruit to be found in Judaism, Jesus dies on the cross; because the Jews have failed, a new temple is created for the Gentiles (11:17).'

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