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# The Apologetic for Miracles in Contemporary Thought

THE question of miracles is to the fore again after a long period during which the subject was rejected by the sceptics and neglected by the Christian apologist. Miracles were the *Streitfrage*, or main-point of controversy in the nineteenth century. And there were, of course, good reasons why the period should have been pre-occupied with the discussion of the problem. It was an era when the omnipotence of science was virtually axiomatic. The Newtonian physics had made it appear that the world was sufficient of itself and that it was able to conduct itself by its own inherent laws without any further aid from God. In such a context the cry went up, 'Nothing Miraculous'. How could God, if God there was, interfere with the unbreakable course of nature? This impossibility is expressed by Pope in his Essay on Man

> 'Think we, like some weak prince, the Eternal Cause
> Prone for his favourites to reverse his laws?'

God can have no makeshifts. He cannot alter the movements of the universe. Under the impact of Darwinianism the world was imprisoned more firmly in the strait-jacket of inevitability. And the gospel of unhindered progress was proclaimed with virtual religious fervour by Frederic Harrison and T. H. Huxley. 'Nothing miraculous', asserted the sceptics; for the scientific understanding of the world has made all ideas of a divine interference impossible. Besides, Hume was ready at hand to be quoted against any who dared to claim that miracles do happen. Hume had made it appear that of all fallacies the worst was to claim that God could, as and when He wished, play fast and loose with the laws of nature.

The queer thing was that both Hume and Darwin, had they but seen it, had undermined their thesis by the way they had stated their case for the rejection of the miraculous. Hume had argued that a miracle is so contradictory of all human experience that it is more reasonable to believe any amount of testimony false than to believe a miracle to be a true happening. But Hume's argument involves a glaring *petitio principii*. A miracle, Hume maintained, is contrary to all human

experience; and by human experience, he meant personal experience. Now it is a fact that we have not ourselves witnessed a miracle. But others claim they have. To make our own experience the measure of all human experience, would be tantamount to making unacceptable the proof of any absolute new fact. The general experience to which Hume appeals, and which, he contends, makes miracles incredible is, after all, merely negative experience. But the positive testimony of one man who witnessed the commission of a certain crime is not rebutted by the assertion of any number of men who were not there and declare that they never saw any such thing. Negative testimony can never neutralise that which is positive, except upon principles which would render void all human testimony. Hume falls into the self-contradiction of seeking to discredit faith in human testimony, by adducing to the contrary the general experience of men which we *know* through testimony alone.

The Darwinians, to explain themselves, made much of the concept of 'mutations'. They readily admitted that these saltatory jumps away from the original species were inexplicable. But to say that they are just chancy affairs is surely only another way of saying that they are unpredictable; that they do not act according to ascertainable laws. This, of course, does not mean that they can be pronounced miraculous in any authentic use of that term; but it does suggest that the claim that nature acts according to unbreakable inherent laws is here denied.

It was Hume, however, who called the tune in the earlier apologetic for the miraculous. Christian writers found their arguments too often embarrassed by their acceptance of Hume's definition. By regarding a miracle as an intrusion of the Divine Being to change the laws of nature, and as consequently a breach in the natural order, they could not make good their case by showing how the universe could continue on its ordained course. The general tendency was to appeal to the operation of some unknown higher law or to speculate about miracles as the natural issue of physical laws at work. The purpose of this defence was to stress that a miracle takes place within the natural and physical order so that their evidential character might be underlined. In this regard miracles were seen as proof of God's sovereignty in revelation. Herein He had demonstrated the divinity of the truths He had communicated to man. But the idea of miracles as a violation of the causal nexus became more impossible to defend in the environment which prevailed in the last half of the nineteenth century. It was felt

by some that it was no longer reasonable to seek to justify the so-called natural miracles. Emphasis began to be laid upon the moral miracles and it was contended that here at least is a realm not under the rule of unbreakable natural law. Here God is free to act. Thus in the end, the reply to the sceptic 'Nothing miraculous', was; there are 'moral miracles'. The result here was to leave the physical world—the world of natural science—outside the interference of God.

The eclipse of materialism and the upsurge of idealism with the change of emphasis from the divine transcendence to that of the divine immanence brought about a new approach to the idea of the miraculous. The earlier cry of 'Nothing Miraculous' was replaced by that of 'Everything miraculous'. It was left to Schleiermacher to lead this opposing notion of the miraculous. Are not the laws of nature and the evolutionary process itself aspects of the divine working? Contemplated from the religious point of view all nature becomes, in Carlyle's phrase, the living visible garments of God. Any event, even the most natural, is a miracle when viewed religiously. The Darwinians asserted that what others call the miraculous is really natural: the Schleiermacherians taught that what is called the natural is really the miraculous. This last was the notion, having its origin in the *Illumination* period, which found vogue in the pantheistic musings of Wordsworth to whom all nature was instinct with the divine. There was, of course, something suggestive in the idea: and understandable in the lake districts of Cumberland but not quite so discernible in the lust district of China town. The tendency was to equate the vaguely aesthetic with the validly religious. It may be argued that these God-intoxicated individuals, who saw God in every bush and branch, were not altogether pantheistic pietists but that they were the real seers penetrating to the heart of nature. But by making everything miraculous they emptied the word miracle of all effective characterisation.

Under the inspiration of Ritschl a dichotomy was introduced between the realm of the physical and that of the spiritual. Ritschl drew a sharp distinction between the scientific and the religious view of the world. His desire was to exempt religion altogether from the criticism of science by insisting that religion relates only to the category of value. For Ritschl a miracle is not a scientific concept, but a religious one: A miracle has its truth, not for science, but for religious experience. According to Ritschl, any event which might awaken a kindling impression of God's presence is to be termed a miracle: this meant that no special historical events in the past could be granted the status of the

specifically miraculous. This conception of the miracle was given stress by Herrmann, Ritschl's most thorough exponent. He defines a miracle as 'Any event in which we clearly perceive the impinging of God upon our lives'.[1] Such miracles cannot be made 'intelligible' to others; and they need no 'defence'. They lie in the realm of faith and have no real connection with the natural order, the province of scientific knowledge. In no sense can it be said that God breaks through the natural order. 'Our faith can only recognise miracle when in an event within our experience we recognise the impact upon our life of a power not ourselves.'[2] In this context the miracle is what appeals to us as the specifically religious.

By the turn of the century interest in the question of miracles appears to have spent itself. But the pendulum has swung again and the subject has become alive once more. Already the earlier approaches to the problem have revealed themselves. Some have sought to defend miracles within the framework of the scientific world-picture; others contend for an understanding of miracles in the context of religious faith.

Those who take the first line are no longer content to define a miracle as a violation of the order of nature. For science itself has taught us that the idea of natural law is not a statement about the ultimate structure of reality. No longer are the theories of natural science taken as certain literal interpretations of the real constitution of the universe. The relation between scientific theories and the actual physical world is far less close than was originally supposed. Stephen Toulmin has taught us to regard scientific theories as 'maps' of the real world,[3] and R. B. Braithwaite sees them as 'models'.[4] In general, scientific theory and law can be likened to a model produced by the observer in his investigation of phenomena that he might gain some understanding of the world in which he lives. This does not mean that the map or model is a pure invention or a mere subjectivity. It has a sense of objectivity given by what the investigation of the physical world conveys. Nonetheless the map or model cannot be said to be grounded in the nature of things. It has in this sense no ontological status. It is a map or model woven out of the scientist's empirical generalisation, and conditioned, in some measure, by the state of existing knowledge and observational techniques. This means that the

[1] W. Herrmann, *Systematic Theology*, p. 83. [2] Op. cit. p. 85.
[3] Stephen Toulmin, *The Philosophy of Science.*
[4] R. B. Braithwaite, *Scientific Explanation.*

map or model cannot be taken as final since future discoveries may necessitate new constructions.

Does this view of the universe make the idea of miracles more acceptable? Many writers are sure that it does. They feel that there is no reason to be intimidated by the scientists for it is they who have renounced the strait-jacket conception of the universe which prohibited any interference by God. It is consequently argued that the scientific account of the universe cannot give a true account of the ultimate. Indeed, what hints we do gain from the scientists' maps and models suggest that the ultimate nature of reality is personal. It is, therefore, arguable that this personal ultimate, controls the regular pattern of natural events or what is called the laws of nature; and can inaugurate irregular ones, or what is called miracles.

C. S. Lewis rejects the notion that the progress of science has somehow made the world safe against miracle.[1] He stresses that nature in general is regular and behaves according to fixed laws. It is only in an ordered universe that a miracle can, so to speak, be identified as a 'supernatural interference'. Lewis makes the point that a miracle is 'caused' by the direct action of God, but when once introduced it takes its place in the area of the natural and obeys its laws. 'If God creates a miraculous spermatozoon in the body of a virgin, it does not proceed to break any laws. The laws at once take over. Nature is ready. Pregnancy follows, according to all the normal laws, and nine months later a child is born. . . . If events ever come from beyond Nature altogether, she will be no more incommoded by them. Be sure she will rush to the point where she is invaded, as the defensive forces rush to a cut in our finger, and there hasten to accommodate the newcomer. The moment it enters her realm it obeys her laws. Miraculous wine will intoxicate, miraculous conception will lead to pregnancy, inspired books will suffer all the ordinary processes of textual corruption, miraculous bread will be digested.'[2]

For Lewis the interlocking system of nature is not the ultimate. He sees man's rationality as the little tell-tale rift in nature which shows that there is something beyond and behind her. Man's thinking, which seeks to construct a Total System, cannot itself be brought into that system. It requires an explanation in terms which admit of the more than natural. Lewis makes the point that human thought is evidence of the ultimacy of a Higher Thinking; while miracle is a demonstration of the existence of a super-natural order. While the miracles are

[1] C. S. Lewis, *Miracles: A Preliminary Study.* [2] Op. cit. p. 72.

God's short-cut methods, they are yet not disconnected raids on Nature. They are essentially purposeful, fulfilling the needs of God's redemptive plan for the world.

Arnold Lunn in his apologetic for miracles stressed that they have their origin in God's action. He contends that they demonstrate the existence of a divine order and as such are to be regarded as 'above, contrary to or exceeding nature'.[1] It was on this score that he was attacked by Nowell-Smith.[2] He questions the contention that miracles cannot be given 'natural' explanations. Nowell-Smith points out that while scientific *theories* are necessarily changing, the scientific *method* remains constant. And while it is true that miracles cannot be explained in present day scientific theory, is it not obvious that they cannot be investigated by the scientific method. And if they can, then they belong to the order of the 'natural', and may well, one day, be explained in new terms which remain strictly scientific. Nowell-Smith cannot see how miracles demonstrate the existence of a divine order. If God's acts are detectable then a generalisation can be made respecting them which has an accurate predictability. But such an admission would only make the so-called supernatural a new department of the natural. 'The supernatural', concludes Nowell-Smith, ' is either so different from the natural that we are unable to investigate it at all or it is not. If it is not, then it can hardly have the momentous significance that Mr Lunn claims for it; and if it is it cannot be invoked as an explanation of the unusual.'[3] It is not our purpose to enter into an examination of this criticism; which is more clever than convincing. Nowell-Smith merely gives an instance of a faultily constructed dilemma which can be 'rebutted' by the logical expedient of constructing another which appears equally cogent. If the supernatural is different from the natural then it can be taken as an explanation for momentous events of a special character; and if the supernatural is not different from the natural, then it can only account for explicable events. But the supernatural is either different or it is not different: in which case it becomes an explanation for momentous events of a special character or there are only usual explicable events. The stunt of dilemma construction is not, we submit, a sufficient reason for rejecting miracles.

[1] A. Lunn, 'Miracles: The Scientific Approach', *Hibbert Journal*, April 1950—being a reply to Professor H. Dubs, article in same Journal, January 1950.

[2] Patrick Nowell-Smith, 'Miracles' in *New Essays in Philosophical Theology*, ed. A. Flew and Alasdair MacIntyre (1955), pp. 243 f.

[3] Op. cit. p. 253.

I. T. Ramsey seeks to explain the nature of God's activity in the natural world by analogy with an empirical difference which, he holds, is discernible in ourselves.[1] We are all aware of a 'general' activity which characterises ourselves and our world in all ordinary perceptual situations. This 'first order activity', as Ramsey speaks of it, is observable and is therefore open to scientific investigation. Our 'particularised' or 'second order activity', on the other hand, arises through involvement in actual situations. It is here the personal quality of our activity, as it were, comes to prominence. It is, however, a private awareness and is consequently not amenable to scientific generalisation and abstractions. Awareness of this particularised, second order activity can only be invoked; it cannot be inferred. It comes to the fore when a situation comes alive for the one concerned. Since this sense of personal quality is non-objective it cannot be described or contained in impersonal object language. Its 'proof' lies in the actual experience when, for example, a situation is not just 'seen', but when it, to use Ramsey's phrase, 'takes on depth'. Examples are frequent of situations suddenly taking on this sense of depth; when the crust of human experience is broken and hitherto unnoticed meaning, significance and realities are revealed. The 'ice breaks', the 'penny drops', the 'light dawns'.

It is this distinction between impersonal first order and personal second order activity which Ramsey applies to God's twofold relation to the world. He sees a miracle as an event which witnesses to and is the occasion of a 'personal, second order' activity of God. 'What is a miracle?' Ramsey asks. His answer is that it is 'a non-conforming event, a *miraculum* whose non-conformity, whose oddness, evokes, gives rise to, what we have called a characteristic theological situation. With a miracle, a situation "comes alive", the light dawns, the penny drops.'[2] It is when the universe comes alive in a personal sort of way that we have a miracle.

There are, of course, obvious weaknesses in this apologetic for miracles. The distinction drawn between impersonal and personal activity of which our own experience is said to give evidence is taken as substantiating a similar distinction in the mode of the divine activity. But this is surely a case of *petitio principii*. The whole subject of analogy from the human to the divine is here raised, and this is an issue so much in debate that it is unsafe to take it as a foundation upon which to rear such an edifice. If indeed we are only aware of our own second order

[1] I. T. Ramsey, *Miracles: An Exercise in Logical Mapwork.*
[2] I. T. Ramsey, *Religious Language*, p. 144.

activity in a non-inferential way then it is difficult to see how we can be so sure of God's, as to be able to transfer to Him the distinctions claimed to be discoverable in our human activity.

Left as it is, Ramsey's account of miracles yields the conclusion that it is only as man discerns in a situation what he interprets as an activity of God that there is a miracle. Such a conclusion would mean that a miracle may give us some information about the adequacy of our own spiritual insights: it does not give us any certain justification for distinguishing between different modes of God's activity.

Ramsey does, of course, seek to avoid the difficulty by substituting the idea of 'disclosure' for that of 'discernment'. But this does not of itself give us any reason for singling out any special event as such. Ramsey does, to be sure, refer to the oddness and non-conformity of the event, but this does not meet the situation. For the 'disclosure situation' turns out to be one and the same with the 'non-conforming' event; that is a mere tautology. The 'oddness' lies precisely in the fact that a situation has yielded the awareness of God in a personal way and that is what is meant by a miracle. There is no reason why God's personal activity should be limited to special events; for the regular processes of nature can give rise no less surely to the awareness of such activity.

Yet for all this there is undoubted value in Ramsey's approach. It serves to remind us that God's activity cannot be reduced to a neat, uncomplicated formula. But more particularly there is underlined the limitations of objective scientific abstractions to give a total explanation of all events. Ramsey refuses to have God imprisoned in a network of causal relationship. In similar manner Emil Brunner contends that we should rid ourselves of the fiction of a pan-causalism which would exclude God from His universe.[1] It is only, he argues, in the sphere of what is called 'dead nature', that the strictly mechanical and causal idea can be carried through. The fact of our own human experience marks the limitations of causality in our experience of the world. The reality of our own human freedom leads on to that of the divine wherein human freedom has its ground and goal. Divine freedom 'is only revealed in the freedom of revelation, the miracle of the "supernatural" revelation in its perfection: the miracle of the Incarnation and Redemption. And this miracle of the divine revelation is the real "miracle" of which the Bible speaks. And the so-called "miracles",

[1] Emil Brunner, *The Christian Doctrine of Creation and Redemption, Dogmatics*, II, pp. 160 f.

those of the Old Testament and those of the New, are only the "accompaniment" of this one miracle of revelation, the miracle of the Coming of God to man.'[1]

All these writers are anxious to find a place for God's activity in an ordered universe. And they do this, by contending, as Barth says, that 'we cannot hypostasise the concept of law'.[2] They reject any idea of miracles being an interference with the laws of nature in the Humean sense; at the same time they see the theological significance of God's miraculous action in the universe.

It is, however, this religious purpose of what is called a miracle which is the main stress of other writers. It is their conviction that miracles cannot ultimately be explained in terms of natural law. This way of treating the subject is not, of course, new, but it is given effective statement by H. H. Farmer.[3] He begins his account by seeking to remove the idea of the miraculous from the sphere of the mechanical. For Farmer a miracle is essentially a revelatory event; an event, that is, in which and through which a man becomes aware of God as active towards him. In a miracle God meets us both as absolute demand and final succour. Farmer sees a miracle as bringing with it an awareness of the supernatural; of God as active will operative within events. This means for Farmer that the wonder and awe evoked by the miraculous event is not due to its cataclastic accompaniments but to the sense of the 'numinous', the awareness of the presence of God. It is in God's approach to the soul that we have the true explanation of the 'arrestingness and inscrutability' of the revelatory event.

Farmer declares categorically that this understanding of miracles removes from us the necessity of seeking for them intellectual proof. For, since they are revelatory events, the discovery therein of God speaking personally cannot be definable in terms of, nor dependent on, our knowledge of natural processes and relationships. The upshot of this is the assertion that 'each man's miracle and revelation must be his own'.

Farmer is not content, however, to leave the matter there. All revelation discloses God, but it is not therefore all miracle. It is when God comes redemptively in the revelation that we have a miracle. And more specifically when God's succour is felt as something intensely personal and individual that the word miracle becomes more inevitable

[1] Op. cit. pp. 166–167.
[2] K. Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, III, 3, 129.
[3] H. H. Farmer, *The World and God*, Chapters, vii, ix, x.

and appropriate on the lips of the religious man. Farmer underscores his conviction that miraculous events take place through the initiative of God; and that they happen, so to speak, in the world of ordered nature. This does not mean, however, that they sever the causal nexus. Here Farmer finds relief in the modern view which regards the true nature of scientific generalisations as statements of how the phenomenal world does work, not specifications of how the real world must. Farmer regards God as immanent within His world and able to take up every new event into His total workings.

There are many serious problems left question-begging in this account which we cannot follow through here.[1] The one which needs notice here is this;—that Farmer seems to have robbed miracles of real objectivity and reduced them to the subjective personal judgments of the individual concerned in the divine-human encounter through the revelatory event. In this way he can assert they have no proof: but it is not quite so easy to silence the demand that they should be subject to the processes of reflective examination and comparison before they can be accepted as authentic.

This deficiency in Farmer, H. D. Lewis has sought to remedy. He claims that to define a miracle as a supernatural or religious event is too wide.[2] He is emphatic, of course, that a miracle must involve some reference to a religious factor in the determination of events if we are to keep at all to its normal use and association. There must, however, be something more specific than this. This, 'something further' according to Lewis, which sets miracles apart from other events, is that there should be some deviation from the normal course which events would have taken due to some religious factor and yet other than the process of revelation itself and the effect this naturally has on other events.[3]

There is a good deal to commend itself in Lewis's assimilating of a miracle with religious experience. But the question left to be asked is, Is the criterion of deviation from the normal course of events sufficient? After all, who is the judge of this? And in what sense is the deviation to be understood in relation to the normal course of events? But, perhaps, the most serious difficulty is the failure to refer the 'deviation'

[1] See, 'The Conception of the Miraculous and its Place in Christian Belief', P. J. Mitchell, An Unpublished Thesis for the M.Th., Degree, University of London, 1962, for an effective detailed criticism of the views of Farmer and Ramsey.

[2] H. D. Lewis, 'Miracles and Prayer', in *Our Experience of God* (1958), p. 239.

[3] Op. cit. p. 240.

to, or to declare it to be, a direct act of God. By a miracle we do not mean some abnormal event which inspires a religious response.

It is, perhaps, high time we came to something more positive by way of miracle theory on our own account. This we begin by stressing that we regard a miracle as an activity of God, an event in which He is seen to be working in a special way. For the one who believes in the existence of a personal and moral God the issue is clear. The possibility and actuality of miracles derive from that conviction. When adequate account is taken of the testimony of man's moral consciousness, and when full regard is given to that testimony for the moral nature of God, then it will seem most fitting that God should make miraculous interpositions into the natural order for the sake of the moral beings who stand in need of His grace and help. It is indeed the very essence of the Christian world-view that God, as personal and free Spirit, has a moral end in view and that it is His holy, and, therefore, not helpless, purpose to bless men. This involves, for the believer, the conviction that the unity of nature, far from being a system of physical causes and effects, is a free system of divine ends. The reality of miracles finds confirmation in the Christian's own experience of God in Christ. He has become aware of a supernatural power in his own life and it is on this basis that he can go on to accept the recorded miracles of the Scripture which has assured that experience. They have significance for him because they are woven into that revelation which has meaning for his own life.

On the side of cognition, the man who has entered into a living awareness of God as ethical personality cannot but confidently assert the existence of a supernatural order. There is no doubt about the fact that there is ambiguity attached to the term 'supernatural', as, indeed, there is to its cognate one 'natural'. There is a genuine sense in which it can be said that all God does is 'natural' to Him. All that He does is in accordance with some method and is in harmony with His own nature, and must, therefore, be part of the wider rational system of His action. Yet we cannot discard the word 'supernatural', however right it is to insist that all God's activities are normal, rational and intelligible. There are still activities of God outside that 'natural' order, which are 'unusual', and it is these activities that we refer to as 'supernatural' and 'miraculous'.

We would define a miracle as an event in which God, by His immediate agency, departs from His ordinary method of acting; although appealing to the senses it is performed for a religious purpose; and is

of such a nature that there is no violation of causal laws, and yet, the total laws of nature, if they were fully known, would be unable to account for it.

This definition calls for several comments. To begin with, What is meant by saying that a miracle is performed for a religious purpose? Wendland has made the emphatic declaration that 'no miracles are ever experienced by unbelievers'.[1] He goes on to insist that it is in the context of religious experience that their independent, unique and real significance is to be found. It is faith which sees God working and hears Him speaking in any event. The 'mirabile' of the 'miraculum' has significance for the religious life only.

It is without doubt a fact that apart from this subjective personal faith there is no such thing as religious knowledge or perception of the divine working. The New Testament gives us warrant for this stress on the religious significance of the event designated a miracle. The miracle is no arbitrary act of God, no stunning and silencing wonder. A miracle is a sign wrought to express some spiritual reality.

It is, of course, perfectly true, as W. N. Whitehead has said, that 'every event on its finer side introduces God into the world'[2] But, none the less, it must be emphasised that a miracle is not a mere religious reading of every event. It is the religious reading of an event which is itself unique, and which would still be unique however read. In other words, the objective reality of the event as resulting from God's act must be maintained.

R. G. Collingwood denies outright the point for which we are here contending. The meaning and purpose of a miracle is lost, he claims, 'if we regard it as unique and exclusive'.[3] Miracles are, it appears, the religious reading of events, and as such are 'a standing testimony to the deadness and falsity of our materialistic dogmas'.[4] He thus urges, 'To the religious person it is surely true to say that nothing exists that is not miraculous. And if by miracle he means an act of God realised as such, he is surely justified in finding miracles everywhere'.[5] This however is what the religious person does only in a general way and by a loose use of the concept miracle. He still regards only that a miracle in the proper connotation of the term which is in fact 'unique and exclusive'. A miracle is an immediate act of God of a special kind

[1] Johannes Wendland, *Miracles and Christianity*, p. 3.
[2] W. N. Whitehead, *Religion in the Making* (1926), pp. 155-156.
[3] R. G. Collingwood, *Religion and Philosophy*, p. 214.
[4] Ibid. [5] Op. cit. p. 210.

produced for a religious intent; but that is not rightly termed a miracle which is merely a religious appreciation of every event.

What is intended by referring to a miracle as an immediate act of God in which He departs from the ordinary course of nature? There are those who would object to this statement and argue that a miracle belongs to a higher order of nature and is, therefore, only indirectly to be regarded as a work of God. This higher order may be either completely unknown or partly understood. This appeal to the operation of an unknown law or laws is often made so as to leave the so-called miraculous event still in the realm of nature. But this appeal to the unknown, while it does give a certain amount of deference to the notion of ruling laws, is obviously a conjectural device to make the idea of miracles less offensive to the scientifically-minded. This accommodation of the idea of miracle to the notion of law really robs the whole concept of its essential miraculous meaning. The extraordinary event which happens through the intermittent action of some unknown physical law, far from indicating the presence of divine causality, may be believed in by an atheist, provided only he is satisfied that the alleged law has a place in *rerum natura*. It does not call for any special act of God, any more than the sudden appearance of a comet or a meteor within the terrestrial orbit. Here, too, is an instance of an intersection between the wider outer circle of the unknown physical law and the narrow inner circle with which we are conversant.

The case is no better if the miracle is conceived to be the result of obscure physical activity with which we are only partially acquainted. This idea does not really dispense with the divine working; it merely pushes it back into the origination of the system. All miracles may have a natural side; but even if this be true the argument for miracles is no whit weakened, for still a miracle would evidence the extraordinary work of God as immanent. When once this vital reality of a genuine theistic faith is appreciated, this close action and reaction between God as living and personal and His own world, then miracles become at once possible events. The immanent God can impart to His world new impulses which, once originated by His immediate presence, take their place in the cosmic organism and become subject to its laws. But although these impulses arise from within, they have their origin and operation, not from the finite mechanism itself, but from the immanent God. God does not, after all, run in a rut. Unlike Ixion at his wheel, God is not bound hopelessly to the process. He is not incapable of making some unique and dramatic manifestations of

His power. Such new demonstrations are possible because God has not exhausted Himself. It is precisely for the reason that God is not far away that miracles are possible. He is at hand to meet the needs which may be demanded by His moral universe. Miracles and answers to prayer are possible for the reason that they are objects for which the universe is built. In a dynamic universe, of which the living and personal God is the inner core of its energy, results brought about by the immediate action of God cannot be ruled out. The simple fact is that since God is assured by religious faith to be living and personal, and not a mere force or the sum of cosmic processes, miracles *are* possible. They need not be regarded as spelling out 'monster' as Emerson said, but rather as bearing witness to other aspects of the divine character otherwise unknown or unrecognised.

Nor must it be allowed that God is excluded from His universe because of the evidence of uniformity in nature. Were there no settled order there could be no miracle. Miracles presuppose law; and their importance is proof of the recognition of the existence of law. But uniformity is not mechanism: therein lies the error of those who oppose the possibility of miracles on the score of this equation. Nature is a vaster realm of life and meaning, of which human existence is a part, and of which the final unity is to be found in the life of God. Nature's ways may be thought of as 'habits of will'; and its regularities as the regularities of freedom. When, therefore, as William James urges upon us, we rid ourselves of the mechanical and impersonal view of the ultimate, and substitute the personal, then we are seeing things in their truer perspective. The realities of everyday experience, the free activities of thought, choice and love, for example, show plainly that there is much that cannot be brought under the dominion of law. Such realities take place constantly in a uniform world and they cannot be said to violate the order of nature.

Man can act freely in an ordered world. He can bring about results by the operation of his volition which would not have taken place without his willing. It cannot be thought a thing impossible with God, who is the source and the cause of that voluntary ability in man, to act immediately in and to work directly on that system of nature which He has Himself created and now sustains.

A disordered universe is something which we would find repugnant. And it is our conviction that the disorderly world which we cannot endure to believe in is the disorderly world God has not endured to create. Important, however, as it is to have an orderly world, it is

possible for the idea of uniformity to so dominate our minds without rival that we come to believe that this is the full truth about the universe. The notion is then entertained that all that exists is nature conceived to be a great mindless system of interlocking events. But if naturalism is the final truth, then there would be no reason to trust our conviction that nature is uniform. If nature is all, then the question arises, however did we come to believe that there was anything else? This is a problem which the opponents of supernaturalism do not find it easy to answer. The evidences that there are 'rifts' in nature would appear to be overwhelming. But these 'rifts' do not mean that there are breaks in the causal connections. God, however, is not to be thought of as wholly outside the system of nature and here and there, so to speak, stabbing into it by what we call miracles.

Extraordinary, God's miraculous acts may be, but it is not true that they are arbitrary. And it is false to suppose that miracles require on God's part any greater exercise of power than does His providential upholding of the ordinary processes of nature. For a God who is omnipotent such conceptions as more and less have no meaning. The fundamental question is not one of His power but of the moral purpose for which He brings them to pass. The fact is that miracles give evidence of God's gracious restraint as much as they do of His sovereign power. They can be often seen as a check upon His judgements. Miracles are God's unusual methods adopted for His ultimate purpose of the redemption of mankind.

All the miraculous acts of God find their significance and their reality, in 'The Grand Miracle' of God's Incarnation in Christ. 'Every other miracle prepares for this, exhibits this, or results from this. Just as every natural event is the manifestation at a particular place and moment of Nature's total character, so every particular Christian miracle manifests at a particular place and moment the character and significance of the Incarnation. There is no question in Christianity of arbitrary interferences just scattered about. It relates not to a series of disconnected raids on Nature but the various steps of a strategically coherent invasion—an invasion which intends complete conquest and "occupation". The fitness, and therefore credibility, of the particular miracles depend on their relation to the Grand Miracle; all discussion of them in isolation from it is futile.'[1]

But as the Incarnation shows us God's movement into the human situation, so the Cross is God's act within history on behalf of man's

[1] C. S. Lewis, op. cit. p. 131.

sinfulness. The man who has had a personal consciousness of sin and a living experience of forgiveness is in the best position to enter upon a study of miracles. Such a one has already an assurance in his own life of an 'intervention' of God into human history which does not in any way abrogate the causal nexus. Christianity, it has been justly claimed, cannot be proved except by a bad conscience. With such a declaration a man who has entered into the living experience of divine grace through the reality of a disturbed conscience, would agree.[1] God's greatest act is to be seen in His inbreaking in restoring grace into human lives; an inbreaking in which He does not disturb the connections of nature. And since the natural and the moral cannot be 'sundered as with an axe', God's miraculous activities in nature, for which He has a moral purpose, likewise do not interfere with the cosmic arrangements.

In the end it is by a miracle we are redeemed into an understanding of the miraculous. It is only the one who has experienced a miracle who can believe in a miracle.

[1] He who has a disturbed conscience, it is said, carries a bell about with him: Eheu quis intus scorpia! but, tranquillus Deus, tranquillant omnia!