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Concerning miracles: An existential analysis of some critical insights from Hume and Lewis

ABSTRACT

People have questioned the veracity of miracles, especially when viewed as what is extraordinarily contrary or tremendously opposed to the normal course of natural events. Some scholars, headed by David Hume, opine that miracles are not really miracles, especially when understood as a flagrant transgression of nature. Others, spearheaded by Carl S. Lewis, posit that miracles are not only possible, but also real and factual, especially when they are considered from the perspectives of people's experiences. However, flowing from these, this article reasons that the basis of acceptance of miracles is no scientific proof but a living faith that trusts the person, role and function of God in human life. This makes it obvious that, while there are no scientific proofs, there are firm indications that miracles are real in the life of the believing community.

1. INTRODUCTION

A renowned minister was known as a miracle worker and, as he went up the pulpit, loud cheers greeted him. On the basis of extensive advertisements, people came from far and near to receive their miracles. The healing session was dramatic, as many in the crowd were either blind, deaf, possessed, crippled, or had various diseases, including poverty and insecurity. But those who were really and gravely ill scattered in the assembly and were not brought forward during the action time of healing. These had to go back home as they came, disappointed. Some, however, were content to have been there to witness the scene. Later, it was



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rumoured all over the town that those who were publicly manifested as having been cured by the minister were only those ingeniously prepared for the mimic healing session to make money and name. This raises the question: Are there really miracles? As with the vast majority of issues in the intellectual world, the subject of miracle is a topical and disputed one. This is true if miracle is taken in its strict sense of what is exceptionally contrary or stupendously opposed to the normal course of natural events. Instead of the normal natural process of walking on solids, when a human being begins to walk on liquids such as walking on water, we exclaim that a miracle has taken place, because this is beyond the laws of nature and behaviour as we know and experience them. This is in direct conflict with the universal law of gravitation. On what grounds then can miracles be considered possible, if at all? Some scholars opine that so-called miracles are no miracles at all, as miracles understood as flagrant transgressions of nature are simply not possible. Nature cannot be contradicted, for its laws are universal. Above all, miracles are mostly not provable. They are only subjective expressions of those who narrate them. They can carry no objectivity at all. Hume is a strong representative of this position.

Other scholars argue that miracles are not only possible, but also real and factual, judging from the experiences of people and individuals. It is their impression that, while the laws of nature are followed in general terms, there is no outright contradiction in having some exceptions to those laws. The legislator and the author of nature have the power to intervene, in order to show other aspects of reality that govern the totality. Miracles prove and do not destroy nature and its author. Concerning mankind He created, God can repair any damage in the body. That would be a miraculous intervention in human nature. This paper aims to put to synthetic relief the philosophical debate on miracles. Two renowned authors on the subject will guide our reflection. On the one hand, Hume (1975) denies miracles and all meta-empirical reality. On the other hand, Lewis affirms miracles, as he argued in his well-known work *Miracles, how God intervenes in nature and human affairs* (1960). This paper will do a critical study of the problematic of miracle. In particular, it will review and assess Hume's position, which, though replete with flaws, has continued to be cited as evidence against miracles. Could it be that the issue of miracles remains fundamentally miraculous; in other words, exceptional to the normal and the experientially known-to-us? Could it be that we need to go beyond the brutally natural, in order to accept miracles? Could it be that we should seek more for credibility (more faith) than strict scientific proof (brute natural evidence) when the enigma of miracles is at stake? It appears that to reduce miracles to mere nature would mean to dissolve the character of miracle as extra nature. This would miss the point of the miraculous. These and other concerns are of interest to the author of this paper.

2. CONCERNING MIRACLES

There are various meanings of miracles. In nature, we notice extraordinary events and manifestations of elegance, order, and beauty. We then say: "What a miracle of nature!" The rainbow and the fantastic rotations and revolutions of the earth without fail or clash are examples. There are other examples of natural miracles. There are also human miracles. We exclaim the extraordinary prodigies of human ingenuity as miraculous. Examples include technological feats: the computer and satellite, atomic energy, exploration of other planets as well as the fantastic economic, social and architectural marvels of both the ancient and the modern world. These can be called the general sense of miracle: the stupendous, the marvellous, and the extraordinarily fantastic. The strict sense of miracle, however, has to do with what pierces through and thereby surpasses the natural and the human. The miraculous in this real sense is an event that neither brute nature nor pure human powers can produce. Contributing on the theme, Flew writes that a miracle in this special sense is what overrides the usual and normal experience of people and nature. It goes beyond the logical and the natural order and is as such parasitical on the notion of "order" in nature (Flew 1967:346-353). He argues that, for us to either defend or deny miracle, we must establish and clarify the sense of order and nature involved in the miraculous overriding of nature and people.

A miracle in a special sense, therefore, is what happens in spite of nature's inability to bring it about. It is what is done beyond what human beings can do. Thus, a miracle is an event that comes from above. It cannot be identified with the general sense of miracle indicated earlier. Such would be the short list given by Küng as including deep-sea research miracle, economic miracle, technological miracle, and atomic energy miracle. Although fantastic, these are nevertheless produced by human beings and not by God or the Supernatural (Küng 1976:227). It can be said, in a generic sense, that whenever the supernatural intervenes into the natural, there is a miracle. This has rational implications. It means that for discussing miracles at all, we have to understand the distinction between the natural and the supernatural. To accept miracles, we must have experience of the supernatural. The converse is logically true. We would find it difficult to recognise and consequently accept miracles if there were only natural wonders, human ingenuities called stupendous events, but not miracles *per se*.

This is the sense in which John Locke, in his essay *Discourse on miracles*, defined miracle as the individual's experience of something stupendous that the individual takes to be divine. Unlike Hume, who was materialistically agnostic and concretely empiricist, Locke had no problem with believing in the supernatural as the zone and source of miracles. Following Locke, to say that miracles are individual is not to say that they are purely subjective.

There could be external evidence that attests to the validity of the experience as witnessable by others. A miracle does happen, generally, though not exclusively, in an environment and to the person who is open to it. Jesus the wonder worker could not work miracles in some places because of unfavourable circumstances (see Mark 6:4-6; Matt. 13:54-58). This means that our conception of the natural order, strict, lax, or mixed, will determine our openness to, or rejection of the miraculous in the substantive sense. Flew makes the same point when he argues that the problem with showing miracles is to simultaneously maintain strong rules of the natural order and exceptions, in other words, miracles to them. On this aporia, insurmountable obstacle or outright contradiction lies at the core of the miracle problematic. That is to say, we succeed or fail. The miracle commitment depends on the side we have taken *vis-à-vis* the supernatural: whether it is real or unreal.

It is pertinent at this point to introduce an interesting angle to the miracle debate, namely the “no miracle argument”, which is one of the major arguments for scientific realism. The “no miracle argument” states that there are no miracles at all and this is in line with Hume’s position. However, recently, it has been argued though unsuccessfully that the “no miracle argument” is flawed, fundamentally based on the fact that it falls for the base rate fallacy. The basis of this position is that the “no miracle argument” stems from inappropriate neglect of the base rate of approximate truth among the relevant population of theories. Albeit, it should be noted that the base rate fallacy allegation relies on the assumption of the random sampling of the persons from the population in question, which cannot be made in the case of the “no miracle argument”. This implies that the base rate fallacy objection to the “no miracle argument” is dead on arrival. From the polemics of the “no miracle argument”, Henderson (2017) distinguishes between a “local” and a “global” form of the “no miracle argument”. She argues that the global argument plays a key role in supporting a base-rate-fallacy-free formulation of the local version of the argument. On the no miracle polemics, Howson argued that the “no miracle argument” is contingent on committing the base rate fallacy, which means that it is bound to fail. Henderson responded by stating her points against Howson’s position.

From another perspective, Richard and Hartmann (2018) aver that Howson’s argument applies only to one of the two narratives of the “no miracle argument”. The reason is that the other version, which is akin to the form in which the argument was initially presented by Putnam and Boyd, was not affected by this mode of reasoning. This then explains why Richard and Hartmann provided a formal restructuring of that version of the “no miracle argument”, showing its validity and tenability. This further informs the position that the use of subjective priors is consistent with the realist implication of the “no miracle argument” and it shows that a core concern regarding the

suggested form of the “no miracle argument” can be dismissed. Boge (2018) also outlined an argument against global “no miracle argument”. It is consequent on these discourses that this paper interrogates Hume’s entire scepticism and the positive tirade against the belief in miracles *vis-à-vis* Flew’s positive disposition. As a starting point, this article will briefly examine whether miracles break the law of nature or not.

2.1 Law of nature: Broken or surpassed by miracles

By laws of nature, we mean not simply events that happen in nature, but those that happen in regular and predictable ways. Law of nature is the normal and actual course of events (Swinburne 1970:422-429). The “usuals” are taken for granted and not questioned. They are the accepted and usual, just the way things are. That we are born as babies, grow into childhood, adolescence, adulthood and old age is the law of nature of human progression. To be born old and grow into adulthood, adolescence and childhood would be a formidable exception to the known law of human progression. Swinburne argues further that there cannot be repeatable counter examples to genuine laws of nature. When a river flows upstream, it is an exception. But if a stream, instead of the natural law of flowing downstream, now often or repeatedly flows is an exception to the law of downward flow of the stream.

Some scholars, especially the logical positivists and the atomists, opine that freethinkers, sceptics and rationalists deny the possibility and reality of miracles based on the fact that they violate the divine, immutable and eternal laws of mathematics. God established these laws and would not violate them. Rather than violate the law, miracles confirm the law as the usual and the normal. This means that miracles that are exceptions to the rule are not violations of the laws of nature. They can be better viewed as surpassing the law, while leaving the law intact, valid, and undistorted.

Those who doubt miracles would want them to be performed in the presence of the Académie des Sciences of Paris, before the Royal Society of London, and before the Faculty of Medicine under heavily armed guards to prevent any misdemeanours! They would all want to ensure that no laws of nature are violated. Miracles are different from the natural; yet they are real and acceptable. Anyone who benefits from them, even when s/he was previously an agnostic, would spontaneously declare: “I agree, I accept! What a nature-surpassing event, a miracle!” In this sense, Augustine (2006) argued that nature is the will of God; it is his handwork. Yet we know it only in part and only its author knows it fully. When that same author of nature performs a miracle, he shows us another perspective of creation. He neither contradicts nature, nor violates his own rules. He only reveals to us another hitherto unknown aspect of creation. Such divine act, called miracle, neither

violates nor is contrary to nature. At best, it is different from our knowledge of nature, because our knowledge is limited. But the God of nature is not limited. He acts in various ways, naturally and miraculously. In the same line of thought, Holland (quoted by Swinburne [1970:427-428]) argues that miracles do not violate the laws of nature. Indeed, violation of a law of nature is, in his words, a “conceptual impossibility”. This means that miracles, which are the exceptions, do not violate the laws. The laws remain there as always and are neither destroyed nor violated. They are neither contradicted nor abrogated. Holland gives some examples:

- i. The levitation (lifting to the air and leaving it suspended for some time) of a holy person in the Church. This is an exception to the physical law of nature of gravity and magnetism.
- ii. Rising from the dead after being confirmed dead.
- iii. Water turning into wine with no chemical input.
- iv. Somebody getting better from polio in a minute (Swinburne 1970:427-428).

Based on our long-term experience of the laws of nature, these events are impossible, physically speaking. That they have happened must be explained and not simply denied. Their sole credible explanation is miracle! Since they are there as events that confront and challenge us, and yet the progress of the laws of nature continues, we can convincingly conclude that, far from being violations, the exceptional stupendous facts are more of surpassing and less of violating the laws of nature. This article will now examine Hume’s argument that miracles have no possible conviction and should, therefore, be rejected.

3. HUME ON THE REALITY OF MIRACLES

The *locus classicus* of Hume’s treatment of miracles is his two major works: *Treatise on human nature, Section X*, and *Enquiry concerning human understanding, Section XI: “Of miracles”* (1975). Hume gives four major reasons why the belief in miracles is ridiculous and should, therefore, be rejected. His general argument is that no miraculous event has ever been established based on full evidence, full probability and without contrary evidence (Hume 1975:109, 111). This means that the unanimity required in accepting events is absent in the case of miracles. It is clear that the evidence is lacking and that there has always been contrary evidence in all cases of miracles. Why then should anybody assent to them? Hume’s reasons are as follows:

- i. In all history, no miracle has ever been attested to by a sufficient number of men. By men, Hume does not mean any type of men. He specifies that it is

men of credit, men of unquestioned good sense, education, and learning. These qualities of men guide against illusion, suspicion, and deceit. Hume does not mathematically qualify the criterion of sufficiency of number. How many people of such great qualities would suffice to guarantee the acceptance of a miracle as valid?

- ii. There is often contrary evidence in the events of miracles. Hume calls this a principle of nature and it diminishes any assurance we may have of any prodigy to be taken as miracle. Contrary evidence is bound to give rise to suspicion, doubt and even, in some instances, confusion. Each miracle would thereby demand more and greater evidence, which is often not forthcoming.
- iii. Among which kind of people are the miraculous events to be found most of the time? Hume replies: Among ignorant and barbarous nations. If there are cases where civilised people believe, then Hume continues, they received these from barbarous peoples and ancestors. Our problems are transferred to the next generation and to new worlds. Such is accepted, given man's propensity for the marvellous and the unknown. This is part of human nature.
- iv. There is never unanimity in miracles. Not a single case has gone unchallenged with counter testimonies; not one is free from being opposed by an infinite number of witnesses. Hence, two facts are evident. First, miracle destroys the credit of testimony. Secondly, the testimony destroys itself. Historically speaking, the conflict of claims of miracles by various religions, faiths and systems destroys any credibility in miracles.

Tested on the criterion of the probability principle, no miracle has ever amounted to being most probable. On the contrary, Hume continues, there is uniform, "firm and unalterable" experience against miracles; otherwise, they would not be miracles. Miracles are the most improbable of all events (Hume 1975:109, 111). It is more probable that the witnesses or narrators are lying or mistaken than that a miracle occurred. Lewis would reply, against Hume's argument, that we can only say that there is uniform experience if all miraculous reports have been proven to be false. This would mean that no miracle has ever occurred (Lewis 1960:102). Further against the thesis of Hume, we have no uniform experience, only a very small fraction thereof. Experience may not prove uniformity, for the future may not necessarily resemble the past. As rational beings, we must admit openness, spontaneity and the unknown and never be closed to nature's surprises.

Lewis (1970:34) drives the point further by maintaining that Hume is inconsistent in giving two disparate answers to two similar questions. Is nature uniform? Hume's reply to this question is "Yes". Do miracles occur?

Hume's response to this question is "No". Hume imposes uniformity before experience. Flew (1970:34) called this Hume's dogmatic empiricism. We can call it experiential dictatorship that is paternalistic and thereby blocks out future events. Even his use of the probability criterion must force Hume, if he is consistent, to remain in the realm of probability and not of dogmatism nor of dictatorship. This means that miracles are probable; they are not blindly and *a priori* excluded. Hume also argues that miracles could not be true, since the laws of nature are sacrosanct. That is what miracles are wont to do: to violate these laws. Miracles, for being purported violations of such laws, are invalid. They must be rejected.

3.1 Points of critique of David Hume

In presenting Hume's viewpoint on miracles, Flew argues that there are two basic flaws in Hume's thesis, namely his dogmatic disbelief and his failure to provide a sufficient account of the laws of nature that are purportedly being violated by miracles. I will elaborate on these two points briefly.

3.1.2 Hume's dogmatism of disbelief

Hume was presumptuous, as he thought himself to have the incorrigible last word on the matter of whether miracles are real and to be accepted or unreal and to be rejected. The background to this Humean doctrine is evident in his general philosophical view of radical empiricism. Hume rejected all that is not sensible. He even proclaimed war against all books containing metaphysical ideas and doctrines (Hume 1975:165). Hume waged a philosophical war against people with different ideas. He was a radical empiricist and could have no basis whatsoever to consider the possibility of miracles being real. He falsely, in the expression of Flew, thought himself to have the incorrigible last word. His empiricism, however, amounted to self-defeatism. It led to the denial of the very spirit, mind, intellect, and psyche. These are not seen physically, yet they are real. That means that radical empiricism contradicts itself.

3.1.3 Hume's failure to provide account of the laws of nature

Hume was unable to give any account of nature that would justify his viewpoint that the exceptions called miracles would be a contradiction. As explained earlier, the laws of nature would mean the regular and constant *déroulement* (unfolding) of the events in our universe, including our human natural universe. If this is the case, such nature is dynamic, not static. It shows that there remains an ongoing story in the unfolding of nature. Hume seems to be oblivious of this, as he was simply preoccupied with the so-called violation of the laws of nature. Flew argues that stories (of nature and its laws) are veridical (Hume

1975:116); they are in constant mutation. What nature currently presents to us is different from what those who lived a hundred years ago experienced. Although there is some line of continuity, there is change and evolution. Things take different shape in nature and its laws and that is why the laws of science shift and change from one epoch to another. Things happen in different epochs in their own manner and not in ours. Equally extraordinary things happen in different epochs that are not the same in others.

The dynamism of nature, which Hume failed to recognise, makes the openness to miracles real and indeed factual. When Hume argues that there is an everlasting check for the authenticity of miracles, his so-called duo of experience and observation, Flew in favour of Hume corrects this expression by saying that Hume's "is" should rather be "ought". Not that the ultimate standard "is", but that it "ought" to be, experience and observation. On this point, we could argue against Hume that experience and observation show that there are exceptions to the laws of nature. These exceptions are not violations. They are rather extraordinary phenomena that happen, confirming the laws as normal and simultaneously granting the author of nature his supreme right to intervene and make other events real in the same nature. We could conclude that Hume, all radical empiricists and all deniers of miracles need more openness to recognise the reality and power of the author of nature in his continued work on nature. This brings us to consider the viewpoint of Lewis who would positively argue for the possibility of miracles.

4. LEWIS ON THE POSSIBILITY, EXISTENCE, AND REALITY OF MIRACLES

In what we may call his *Apologia pro miraculum*, Lewis, Cambridge Professor of Medieval Philosophy, makes a strong case for not only the possibility, but above all also the reality of miracles. His argument is twofold. On the negative side, he states and replies to the objections of those who deny miracles. On the positive side, he provides arguments to show why miracles are credible, real, and thus to be accepted. Naturalists argue against miracles that the God of nature would be a capricious one if he makes the laws and simultaneously breaks them by performing miracles. It is undignified, indeed a contradiction on the part of the God of nature, to make laws and to break them. This is why the so-called miracles are nothing but illusions for nature, as nature cannot contradict itself. Lewis replies to this, by arguing that miracles are not at all a breakage, a stoppage, or a suspension of the laws of nature. Laws of nature as laws are not causes. Even when an exception occurs to the natural ways of things, those natural ways did not cause them. It is another force beyond these laws. Miracles are, therefore, no lawbreakers. They happen, and they

join the totality we experience, because nature is not everything. Those who deny miracles make the error of limiting the reality of nature (Lewis 1960:95).

4.1 Contra naturalism

Lewis (1960:100) argues further against the naturalist who sees everything as nature, God included. God is viewed constantly as being unable to stand outside nature to create or care for it. This would imply that there cannot be miracles understood as external intervention. This view is refuted in that it takes the part to be the whole. As pointed out earlier, nature cannot be everything. Even talk of nature implies talk of supernatural. That supernatural in its Ultimacy, called God, is causally responsible for nature. Naturalism must, therefore, be open-minded to accept other aspects of reality.

4.2 Contra supernaturalism

Lewis (1960:105) also confronts the supernaturalist on the latter's own grounds. The supernaturalist reduces everything to spirit, to God. But if God were to be everything, deficiencies such as suffering, wounds, tragedy and other evils in nature would not exist, since God is all good. But these evils do exist, and point to God's distinct reality. While he is different from other realities, he must be regarded as providentially responsible for their continuity and ongoing perfection. At times, he performs this perfecting function by way of miraculous intervention, in such a way that portrays the totality of reality itself. Miracles must, of course, interrupt the usual course of nature; but if they are real, they must, in the very act of so doing, assert all the more the unity and self-consistency of total reality at some deeper level (Lewis 1960:61). Another strong positive argument in support of miracles is the fact that nature as nature is not absolute. It is modifiable. That supernatural power can modify nature shows that nature has the potential of being modified.

We can say that the condition of the possibility of miracle is the modifiability of nature by super-nature. Lewis regards the fact that nature can be modified as the essence of nature. He illustrates this with a firm example. The way in which a woman can bear a child to a man, and not be able to do so without him, so is nature capable of producing miracles to super-nature. Without this "masculine" force of super-nature, nature cannot produce miracles (Lewis 1960:62). With that force, miracles can obviously happen. When we admit the reality of super-nature, the possibility of miracle is laid bare and even likely, as can be substantiated in Christianity which is more than mere abstract religiosity. There we find a *Grand Miracle*: the Incarnation of God in history. We also find numerous other interventions of God in our world in the miracles of Jesus and the Saints. Lewis is convinced that, from the rational-philosophical perspective, miracles are possible. More than merely possible,

they are real and present in the action of the author of nature in his creation (Lewis 1960:65).

5. MIRACLES: BELIEVABLE BUT NOT PROVABLE, CREDIBLE AND NOT SCIENTIFIC

Hume (1975:116) made the solid point that miracles never had a universal assent and that disputations characterise miracles. He asserts that these facts are evidence against their universal validity. If we admit the two facts while avoiding his conclusion, if we accept the historical truth about miracles (that they have no universal acceptability), then we must admit that something more must be mentioned about the grounds for accepting miracles. It is obvious that we cannot on faith and on rational grounds admit that every happening declared to us as miracle is miracle. We want to admit that universality is not a characteristic of miracles, anywhere, any time and in any way. Rejections have been known. Doubts have existed. Outright falsehoods have been shown to be the case in some instances. Yet doubt does not prove something wrong. It may suspend judgement; it may issue caution, and it may force us to go further and produce either proof or more solid ground for assent. This is the positive value of doubt. It can be useful, beneficial, and salutary. But doubt must not be allowed to destabilise and so render moribund the effort to assent to the truth that is presented. Above all, we may not be justified to take the extreme position of dogmatic empiricism as Hume did.

We admit the fact of the absence of universal assent of miracles. But this is not unique to miracles, as there is also no universality in most of the other areas of enquiry – the natural, the moral and even the philosophical sciences. Even Hume's thesis of rigorous empiricism has no universal admission. On the contrary, many reject it. This means that we can admit some events, given a strong basis (rational and creedal), despite disagreements. Miracles are examples of this. It is true that, on purely philosophical grounds, we cannot claim any undisputed proof of miracles. Indeed, the problematic of the authenticity of miracles is to show them to be the case beyond the claims of being from revelation. Frankly speaking, we cannot use revelation to prove miracles, since that would be using X to prove X, yet philosophy is not out to confront, less still contradict religion or its revelation. Rather, it can challenge that faith in respect of the claims it makes on miracles to make its case clear. Flew (1967: 347) makes this point by stating that faith must justify itself, make itself credible and present itself as reasonable, at least as not irrational.

Küng makes this point the key of his discussion about miracles. He uses two expressions to portray the same strong demand made on the *avant-gardes* (champions) of miracles: they are to present a "credible faith" and

usher in a "justifiable reason". For instance, commenting on the miracles of Jesus in the Christian Bible, Küng (1976: 233) mentions that, while believing the good, we must explain the miracle that goes with it satisfactorily both to ourselves and to others. Believing miracles alone shows that something is wrong with both them and us. We must discuss and attempt to present them creditably. Did Küng himself succeed in doing this? In the same line of thought, Rahner (1963:12), writing on the miracles of visions and prophecies of our times, argued that anyone who alleges such vision and prophecies must prove them; to him or her belongs the burden of proof. Indeed, such things must not be presumed (to be true); they must be proved.

The highest success we can score is not that of proving Christian miracles or any miracles for that matter. As experiences of persons in their unique environment, they are unrepeatable and thereby unprovable. In the words of Küng (1976:233), miracles in the strictly modern sense of breaking through the laws of nature, cannot be historically proved. Indeed, miracles will remain forever disputed. Indeed, miracles have a special function, even in the Christian dispensation. No one can prove them the way in which Hume wanted to. But we can show their value, their relevance and their functions in the community that accepts them. The basis of acceptance of miracles is not any scientific proof, for such does not exist. The basis is a living faith that trusts the person, role, and function of God in human life and welfare. In this instance, philosophy may approach theology and reason join hands with faith.

While there are no scientific proofs, there are firm indications that miracles are real in the life of the believing community or what Rorty (1982:1979) would call *the scientific community*. While left to themselves, miracles can be ambiguous, indeed proving little or nothing. Taken in the context of faith, miracles have a unique function of solidifying the faith and confirming the authentic life of the people. The supernatural is at stake in miracles. We must accept this fact to be able to discuss miracles rationally. Rahner (1963:22-23) makes his point that the supernatural, God himself, is the *fundamentum* in miracles; the duty of faith flows co-naturally from the fact that God himself speaks and there is no need for another special act of God to oblige man to believe his will. It can thus be stated that the significance of miracles is not the granting of the faith in God. Rather, it is only an added enthusiasm to an already possessed faith. Put schematically: God first, not miracles first. This is what Küng (1976:234) means when he writes that miracles do not prove revelation and that faith is not built on miracles but on trusting acceptance of God for what he is: Lord. Without this trusting faith, miracles are useless, and may even become harmful.

This phenomenon accounts for why Jesus, who could do all things and who had worked all kinds of miracles, could not work any in his home town.

When the curious Pharisees and even Herod demanded miracles, they did not have the miracle-working faith. They put the cart before the horse and the result was failure of miracles. As commented, while analysing the case of Hume, the acceptance of the supernatural must come first. This was the case with Jesus; faith in the Messiah, his person, mission, and significance must come first, and then miracles, signs and wonders will follow to confirm the already accepted truth of God.

6. CULMINATING REFLECTIONS

Although Hume, Henderson (2017) as well as Dawid and Hartmann (2018) dispute it, miracles as the wonders of the world will end the day the world ends. It is difficult to dispute the “miracles” of the world and humanity within it, and the marvels of nature and the prodigies of civilisation. These have been and will continue to expand. Such wonders will never cease. They are ongoing. They portray the immense powers of nature and of man, one of the prodigies and inhabitants of that nature. Progress brings more progress, wonders usher in more wonders, and miracles give rise to more miracles. As a sign of the supernatural, miracles confirm and manifest divine truth. They represent the truth of God’s power over death and sin. Positively, it shows redemption by God as confirmed in Christ’s work and mission as Messiah. Further miraculous cures bespeak God’s compassion and loving will to save.

Although some persons, including self-appointed pastors, could be involved in the mission of fake miracles, although some cures could be only purported and not real, and although many try to arrogate to themselves the divine power to intervene in nature and human life, these aberrations do not cancel the authentic cases of miracles that God does effect in the lives of human beings. Indeed, abuse does not negate use in any way. God’s power to work miracles is unceasing and unlimited. From the religious perspective, we would ascertain that miracles are possible because the ultimate cause of miracles has the continued omnipotence to perform them. If God is God, then miracles can come from him. Methodologically, evidence could and must be sought to distinguish the true from the fake. Such evidence, objective and veridical, would authenticate the ongoing reality of miracles in our world and in our society. The ability to separate the sheep from the goat will dispel any generalised scepticism about miracles. Fake miracles will be proved to be fake; genuine ones will show themselves. Through effective discernment, sustained study and patient evidence, humanity will be restored to confidence in miracles. Through historical witness and long-lasting hindsight proof, real miracles will be shown to be so. Indeed, miracles will never cease.

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