

WEST BADEN READINGS

in philosophy and theology

*From the Mallin*

MIRACLES

by

JOSEPH DE TONQUÉDEC, S.J.



Article entitled "Miracle" in  
*Dictionnaire Apologétique de la Foi Catholique*



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"Miracles" is an authorized translation of an article by Joseph de Tonquédec, S.J., entitled *Miracle*, which appeared in the DICTIONNAIRE APOLOGÉTIQUE DE LA FOI CATHOLIQUE, (vol. III, cols. 517-573), edited by A. d'Alès, and published originally by Beauchesne et Ses Fils, 117 Rue de Rennes, Paris, in 1926. All rights reserved.

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**INTRODUCTION**

The article here translated into English for the first time came originally from the gifted pen of Father Joseph de Tonquédec, S. J. It was written in 1918 as one of his contributions to the *Dictionnaire Apologétique de la Foi Catholique* under the title of "Miracle." Here it appears with an extensive bibliography of books and articles on the miraculous written from 1918 to 1955.

At first sight it might seem strange that an article almost forty years old should now be judged worthy of an English translation. A survey of the facts, however, will make it clear that Fr. de Tonquédec's article still stands today as one of the outstanding presentations of the theology of miracles. Both his book on miracles, *Introduction à l'étude du merveilleux et du miracle*, as well as his resumé of that book found in the present article are frequently referred to and used as a basis in many scholarly works touching on this subject.

Moreover, a brief perusal of the bibliography appended to this study will disclose the present dearth of Catholics who have taken upon themselves a defense of and a positive proof for the principles underlying the Catholic position on miracles. This scarcity of excellent Catholic expositions becomes all the more noticeable if one limits his view to the works in English on the Catholic theology of miracles. Surprisingly enough, very few Catholic answers have come forth in English dress to counter the disproportionately large number of non-Catholic expositions on the subject. Hume, Stuart Mill, Tyrrell, and Dewey — to mention only a few outstanding English-speaking opponents of the very idea of miracle — have had many popularizers and elaborators to keep their negative views before the minds of the English-speaking world. This present translation, along with its companion volume on *Mystery and Prophecy*, has been undertaken in an effort to counterbalance these negative ideas and to reduce somewhat the genuine lacuna in English apologetics on the Catholic theology of miracles.

As a help toward this goal and as a possible guide to those wishing to investigate further into the facts and theory of miracles, a fairly extensive bibliography has been appended to

this present translation. It embraces books and articles, Catholic and non-Catholic, treating of the miraculous and related subjects. The general limits of this bibliography are writings in the English language after 1918, although the special worth of some books and articles has led the translator not to apply these limits in an iron-clad fashion.

To his knowledge, it is the first arrangement of systematic references to books and articles touching such various aspects of the miraculous as the following: the idea of a miracle itself, the source of the classic objections against miracles, the usual treatment given miracles by well-known American educators and by general studies in philosophy and religion, the background and methodology needed in studying the miraculous, and — what is probably most interesting of all — the concrete instances of miracles, whether real or alleged. Regarding this last category, the bibliography offers some hints and suggestions for those interested in the resurrection of Jesus, the other miracles of His life, the miracles connected with the Saints, the Eucharist, and the Church. Special emphasis has been given to Lourdes, Therese Neumann, stigmatization, and the other physical phenomena connected with mysticism, since these topics are especially under discussion today. Finally, cross-references to other bibliographies touching on one or other of these subjects have been woven into the bibliography wherever this seemed helpful.

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At the beginning of this study it seems well to call attention to the precise aspect from which Fr. de Tonquédec is viewing miracles. He is writing as an apologist. Hence, he is concerned here with establishing just the first of the two propositions which form an argument in favor of the religion founded by Jesus Christ and represented by the Catholic Church. The two propositions forming this argument are:

1. Certain external recognizable facts can take place which will indicate God's special intervention in this world as well as His will to guarantee certain religious doctrines.
2. Facts of this type have taken place in favor of the doctrines taught by the Judaeo-Christian tradition — and never in favor of any other teaching.

The boundaries of the present article are marked out by the complexus of statements contained in this first proposition. Therefore, it is not to be expected that Fr. de Tonquédec will here

take up individual cases of miracles or examine the reports of doctors, scientists, and witnesses regarding such cases and the phenomena closely connected with them. If one wishes to investigate these and to prove the second proposition just mentioned, he is immediately directed by Fr. de Tonquédec to other articles in the *D.A.F.C.* For instance, he should consider Apocrypha, the Acts of the Apostles, Biblical Criticism, Fetishes, Miraculous Cures, Hysteria, Lourdes, Magic, Spiritualism, and many other topics touching on wonders and miracles. However, Fr. de Tonquédec is careful to single out the illuminating article on Jesus Christ, especially its third chapter, (*D.A.F.C.* II, cols. 1288-1538), because the Gospel miracles are the central point sustaining the proof that miracles have occurred, and thus establish the second proposition.

Concentrating in this article upon the first proposition, Fr. de Tonquédec has made it his task to examine the very concept of miracle, subject it to the acid tests of philosophical and historical criticism, and show that it comes out from them unimpaired. Hence, the aim of this article is to prove that there is no *a priori* reason which has any weight against miracles and, moreover, that a sound philosophy and true historical method should be disposed to accept miracles.

Both philosophers and historians appreciate the import of miracles since it is a subject that cannot fail to cause deep repercussions in morals, science, and other fields. Being of such interest, the subject of miracles arouses the close attention of many different groups, but for a variety of reasons.

For example, a "miracle" to the ordinary person will involve an exciting account of something that is different from his humdrum routine. If he is religiously inclined, it may even offer some external confirmation of his belief that the supernatural world is a real one.

But for those among the more cultured who have been led by their education to discredit the whole idea of the supernatural, "miracles" will be interesting either because they are regarded as discomfiting, unshakable vestiges of medievalism or because they shout out as direct challenges to their seemingly snug naturalism — challenges that would have them give ear to the very words of God and follow His directives. Evidence of this latter type of concern is clearly mirrored in the fifth thesis of the now famous *Humanist Manifesto*. This manifesto was subscribed to by thirty-four outstanding leaders in American university circles who thereby styled themselves as "religious humanists." In this document these men first decided to

employ the modern label of "cosmic guarantees" in place of the old-fashioned word "miracles." Then they launched their attack against miracles by proclaiming the thesis "that the nature of the universe depicted by modern science makes unacceptable any supernatural or cosmic guarantees of human values." (Cf. *The New Humanist*, First Series (May-June, 1933), Vol. VI, No. 3, Thesis 5.)

Such is one present-day non-Catholic view of miracles. There is, finally, the Christian apologist, for whom miracles hold a key position. He knows that miracles and prophecies are the best God-given criteria available to men for recognizing with certainty that a particular doctrine actually stems from God and deserves acceptance as His word. He also sees that the historicity of the Gospels stands or falls with the reality of miracles. And he realizes that any defense of the reasonable-ness of the Faith must ultimately be founded upon miracles (and prophecies). They are the convincing signs of God's supernatural intervention in the course of history and of His super-teaching an authoritative message to men. Such are some of the chief reasons lying behind the efforts which the apologist puts forth to explain and defend miracles.

These same reasons are, moreover, clearly appreciated by the discerning eye of the rationalist opposition. For if they once admit a miracle, they cannot avoid an obligation to believe. That Renan, Strauss, and other rationalists manifest their acute awareness of the crucial importance of miracles can be seen by anyone who studies the introductions to their *Lives of Christ*. And with each side — both apologist and rationalist — keenly aware of miracles' significance and surprising that this subject has frequently raised strong controversy. Too much is at stake to be indifferent.

It is hoped that this sketching of the two opposing parties will offer a background of some sort to the reader as he enters into Fr. de Tonquedec's presentation.

\* \* \*

A few words regarding this English translation. Accuracy, precision, and fidelity to the original French have been the main objectives of the translator. He has also tried to present these ideas in smooth-flowing, idiomatic English. In some instances the complexity of the reasoning and the abstractness of the subject have forced the translator to give his preference to fidelity rather than to some off-hand paraphrase that would only approximate the original. The effort to concur with modern

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usage has led to the division of the longer French paragraphs and the frequent break-down of an involved sentence into several in the English.

The translator would like to render grateful acknowledgment to Beauchesne et Ses Fils, copyright owners of the *Dictionnaire Apologétique de la Foi Catholique*, for granting the translation rights to this article. To Rev. E. R. Smothers, S. J. and Br. F. H. Snider, S. J., to the painstaking readers of the manuscript, and to all whose cooperation has made this translation possible, the translator wishes to express his very sincere appreciation.

Frank M. Oppenheim, S. J.

West Baden College,  
February 11, 1955,  
Feast of Our Lady of Lourdes.

MIRACLES

*Dictionnaire Apologétique de la Foi Catholique*

Paris, 1926, 3:517-578

## AUTHOR'S FOREWORD

What will be explained succinctly in this article was treated more at length in our work, *Introduction à l'étude du merveilleux et du miracle*, Paris, Beauchesne, 1916. The necessity of treating things here in resumé and only along broad lines has forced us to delete many nuances and shades of thought, to reject the idea of following up certain discussions to their crucial turning-point, and lastly, to drop certain arguments that were quite helpful, if not indispensable. In certain places we have had to content ourselves with a simple assertion, since it was impossible to present the complete proof briefly. Practically all the concrete examples have disappeared. The presentation of contrary views has become very summary. Of them we have preserved only what was strictly necessary to impart some understanding of the objections which could be brought against our theses. Thus it would be making a mistake to form a judgment about certain systems of ideas, which are quite complicated at times, from the few things we say about them here. Moreover, we have been forced to free this study from the mass of references contained in the book. Consequently, even though explicit citations from our *Introduction* are given at times, we wish, once and for all, to direct to that book those persons who may not be satisfied with the presentation and the proofs here offered.

However, it is our belief that this exposé is as complete as a resumé should be, and that everything essential has at least been pointed out, if not explained. By way of rare exception, some special point may be treated more precisely than in the book, due to further thought on the subject and to suggestions which we have considered well-founded. For example, confer pages 49-50 (footnote <sup>42</sup>), 70-74, and 88-94.

## THE STATE OF THE QUESTION

When we use the word "miracle," what meaning do we attach to the term? Just what are we talking about in this article? Is there really a problem concerning miracles? If there is, what does it consist in? and why does a person have to face this problem?

While the world follows its course and continues to reel out its fabric of ordinary events woven of natural laws and human freedom, there arises at times in the minds of men the question of mysterious events. These events seem to be intentional and appear as snags in that uniform fabric; or, to speak more accurately, they seem inserted into that fabric as the work of some unexpected cooperator. Many people are convinced that these mysterious events are actually the flowering forth into our world of influences from another world. And one cannot decide for no reason at all and without some definite method that these people are wrong at all times and in every case. Here then is a problem claiming our attention. We will call it the problem of the wonderful.

Consequently, we will use the word *WONDER* throughout this study to designate those *exteriorly verifiable phenomena which can suggest the idea that they are due to the extraordinary intervention of some intelligent cause other than man*. This definition contains no preconceived notion about the nature of the facts or about their origin. It limits itself to setting down a mere appearance, the basis for the opinion attributing the facts under consideration to supernatural agents, such as the one God or several gods, or spirits, angels, sprites, demons, or the souls of the dead. The definition does not even contain a preconceived notion about the reality of the facts, for it remains to be seen whether there were any facts that may have produced just this mere appearance. Here then we have a completely nominal and extrinsic definition that cannot conflict with any doctrine. Its only purpose is to point out the subject we are going to treat. A few words will suffice to delimit its meaning.

a) We are speaking of *exteriorly verifiable phenomena* in the wide sense which means not only those phenomena that can be observed directly, such as a sudden cure, but also those which



would simply be inferred to be real from exterior events, such as a prophecy that was fulfilled. The main thing we have in mind are events in the physical order. These are our direct and immediate concern. And the discussions will turn mainly about such physical events. However, what we say will be applicable, *servatis servandis*, to what people sometimes call the "moral miracle"; namely, that unusual occurrence wherein human intelligence and will play their roles without apparently offering a sufficient explanation for the event. Here, too, it really seems that a higher intervention has occurred which is exteriorly verifiable. Consequently, the only phenomena we are leaving completely outside our field of investigation are those purely internal and psychological ones which can be revealed to us only through the testimony of the experiencing subject; for example, subjective visions, or what the mystics call supernatural states. And yet, even in these cases, the principles we are establishing would be applicable; for example, if an individual who thought he was experiencing such states undertook to pass judgment on them.

b) Moreover, in our definition we are speaking of the *extraordinary* intervention of some intelligent agent. It is a fact that the ordinary appearance of the universe, the order reigning in it, and the clear tokens of coherent design stamped upon it can already suggest the idea that some higher intelligent agent is at work here. Nevertheless, since this activity is constant, common, expected, and not at all exceptional, it is by that very fact outside our subject matter.

We bring no philosophy into play in order to insert that perfectly plain distinction between the ordinary and the extraordinary, which is enough for us to start this study. We call upon no particular conception concerning the "laws" of nature. In no way do we attempt to define the meaning of rarity or frequency. We take just one point for granted, and assuredly few people will want to contest it. This point is that there exists a means of distinguishing the interventions of any kind of liberty from the ordinary course of nature. This means that an event which stems from some particular free choice or some deliberate arrangement of circumstances directed towards special goals will stand out in sharp contrast to the general order. We accept the ground on which Renan placed the problem. He says that in the universe "everything is in perfect order and harmony; and yet there is nothing particularly intentional. . . . If there were beings acting in the universe as man acts on the surface of his own planet, . . . you would notice it." Just so. We are setting aside the operations

of nature and man and trying to discover whether there is something else besides.

c) For us a phenomenon will not at all be considered as wonderful just because it is new or unusual or rare or because its cause is unknown. What is needed beyond this is that the phenomenon show some sign of being the result of definite choices by some intelligent being other than man. In spite of their puzzling mysteriousness, the new properties discovered by the physical sciences — such as the transmission of electromagnetic waves, radioactivity, and so on — clearly do not possess this characteristic in any degree.

We will call a *REAL WONDER* that event whose appearance is in conformity with reality.

We will reserve the word *MIRACLE* for that particular category of wonders which can be attributed to the intervention of a God who is unique and distinct from the world, such as the God of the Christians or simply of a spiritual philosophy.

Why must we deal with the problem of wonders and miracles? For the same reason that we have to deal with the problem of religion. The idea of supernatural or extra-natural prodigy is one of the most widespread and fundamental of concepts in the positive religions. A person cannot possibly solve the problem of religion without making up his mind on this question — I mean the question of miracles in general, and not the question of some story about wonders that might seem at first sight to be deservedly unacceptable. We are not concerned with this or that detail. We are looking at the whole picture. Are we permitted to brush aside this entire question without examination? May we, under the sway of scornful prejudice or instinctive disgust, reject the very hypothesis of supernatural interventions in this world? What if behind one or other of those extraordinary events the divine was concealing itself? What if underneath those lowly sensible appearances there was an invitation or possibly an order coming to us from the Infinite? Would we not be guilty of having neglected them? So long as the supposition has not been judged to be obviously absurd, the duty of examining it remains.

Once a person admits that a problem about religion does exist and that every man should consider and solve this problem without eliminating any of its factors, then he cannot take refuge in ignoring the present question. When face to face with an idea so persistent and so deeply rooted among men as the idea of miracles, and when confronted with facts, which if once established might possibly modify the very foundation of our moral

life, no man who is sincere with himself can be satisfied with shrugging his shoulders and passing on. He has to face the troublesome subject, if only to prove to himself that he can legitimately be unconcerned with it.

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The majority of those who deny miracles have made up their minds against them because of philosophy or because of critical method. As these men scan the facts or documents, they are persuaded in advance that miracles are either impossible or unrecognizable, or at least that it would be imprudent from a critical point of view to admit them. Consequently, the result of their investigations is predetermined; it can only be negative. Hence, it is the presuppositions that are more important than anything else in this matter. In them are found at least the most important difficulties, if not all of them. And that is why we are going to examine in two successive parts the philosophical attitudes and the critical attitudes which precede the examination of the facts. We shall always contrast the correct attitude with those attitudes which are shown to be defective.

## PART THE FIRST

### THE PHILOSOPHICAL ATTITUDES PRESUPPOSED FOR THE EXAMINATION OF THE FACTS

Of the various philosophical attitudes that exclude miracles, the only ones that should be considered here are those which propose specific arguments directly opposed to miracles. There are other philosophical attitudes that exclude miracles by way of necessary consequence and without having to bother about them in particular. For example, miracles are obviously incompatible with atheism, materialism, and fatalism. In these doctrines the denial of the supernatural flows out of some general world outlook as a simple corollary that lacks interest or any special difficulty. Moreover, it is clear that once certain persons have embraced premises like these, the thing to be discussed with them is these premises and not the question about wonders. Consequently, we pass by such systems of thought and fix our attention on those attitudes which are aimed directly and specifically against the idea of miracles. The attitudes which are most important today can be arranged under three headings: naturalism, determinism, and philosophies of contingency.

## CHAPTER I

### NATURALISM

**EXPOSITION.** Naturalism consists precisely in the *direct* denial of miracles as *supernatural facts*. According to naturalism, the world we live in is a closed system into which nothing enters from the outside. The events occurring in it, however strange they may be, must all find their explanation in the forces or elements composing our world and in the influences that regularly operate in it. The manner in which beings and realities develop proceeds according to a single pattern which

is identical with itself — regardless of whether this be contingent or necessary, reducible to matter or spirit, or rather, a resultant of various factors.

"As far as I'm concerned," writes T. H. Huxley, "I must confess that the term *nature* embraces the totality of existing things. . . . I cannot conceive of any reason for cutting up the universe into two halves, one natural and the other supernatural." And Anatole France says, "Either this thing exists or it does not exist; and if it does exist, then this thing is in nature and therefore natural." As a result everything can be explained in the same manner as the things which have already received a scientific explanation. To find the nature of anything whatever, all we have to employ are the given facts of the universe presents to us. This includes data from physics, chemistry, biology, psychology, and other such fields. We shall encounter only what we know already and, possibly lying behind these things, other similar facts that we will be able to discover some day.

If liberty exists on this earth, we must seek its source in man. This liberty is a part of the world; and although it is the opposite of necessity, it inevitably shows itself at one moment or another in the ordinary course of events. If spirits exist, our only concern will be with those that have bodies. The use which other spirits might possibly make of their freedom surpasses our powers of observation. If there is a God present and active in His work, then His activity is wrapped up in the activity of secondary causes and never shows itself separately.

These fundamental theses take on varying shades of meaning with the various philosophers. There are the ordinary deists for whom the invariable decrees of the divinity allow of absolutely no exception. There are pantheists and monists who identify Him with nature or with spirit or with reality. Moreover, there are agnostics, positivists, and others who claim that every attempt to transcend experience is useless; for example, to seek the causes of some phenomenon. Beyond philosophical circles, naturalism is gaining ground and permeating everything. Whenever confronted with any extraordinary happening, many learned persons, litterateurs, and historians instinctively assume the intransigent attitude which we just heard Huxley and Anatole France describe. Religious groups and even Christian circles are not immune from this contagion.

Since the time of Reimarus (whose *Wolfenbuttel Fragments* were published by Lessing in 1777 and 1779) and of Paulus

(1761-1851), there has arisen an exegesis which claims to answer the two following questions in regard to every account contained in the Sacred Writings: (1) Did the narrated event actually take place? (2) How could it have taken place naturally? Since the time of Schleiermacher (1768-1834), there have been some theorizers about dogma who have tried to attach a purely natural meaning to the creeds and to wipe out the line of demarcation between miracles and other events. Liberal Protestants belong to this group as well as the Modernists of Catholicism.<sup>2</sup> All of them, with varying degrees of clarity and complexity, are again eagerly adopting the definition proposed by their common ancestor, Schleiermacher:

"Miracle is just the religious name for an event. As soon as any event presents itself to the receiving subject in such a way that the religious aspect is the dominant one, then, even if it be the most natural and most ordinary of events, it is a miracle. The more religious you are, the more you will see miracles everywhere."<sup>3</sup>

**CRITICISM.** You can see that naturalism is a Protean doctrine, capable of spreading out into the most varied of systems and of fitting in with the most disparate of ideas. The important thing, when judging naturalism, is certainly not a survey of all its evolutionary developments. On the contrary, sound method demands that we view it as detached from its occasional associates and confined to its own arguments. And it should be free, too, from those artificial restrictions which it might undergo in this or that situation.

Consequently, we will not consider those cases where naturalism seems ruled by broader, more fundamental principles; for instance, those of agnosticism or positivism. We can also set aside the objections which naturalists could urge against any intervention into this world by the God of the Christians or the God of a spiritual philosophy. Really, such objections do not come from the naturalists alone. They do not spring from the basic position of naturalism. They do not attack the supernatural as such but only a certain type of the supernatural. And even then they have a special reason for urging their objections.

<sup>1</sup> Cf. the *Encyclopédie des sciences religieuses* of F. Lichtenberger, Tome X, p. 303.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. the numerous examples and references in our *Introduction*, pp. 22 ff.

<sup>3</sup> Fr. E. Schleiermacher, *Reden über die Religion an die Gebildeten unter ihren Verächtern*, Berlin, 1799, pp. 117 f.

For these can be turned into makeshift arguments, sometimes aimed merely *ad hominem*, against persons clinging to theism.<sup>4</sup> If you look at naturalism as it is in itself and in its whole extent, you will see it either as a mental outlook deemed self-evident, or else as a logical system built upon several steps of induction or deduction.

It would be a mistake to think that this first type of naturalism is rare. Quite the contrary. The "self-evident" naturalism is rather common, especially among the learned, among litterateurs and historians. It has become a kind of instinct with them. Many of them do not bother to set clearly before their eyes the basic formula of their naturalistic thinking. For them naturalism needs no proof, and they are willing to presuppose it as holding true in all cases. For some people naturalism is an axiom, while others put it forth as an indispensable "postulate" for the mind of man.

Now the least that can be said is that this axiom or postulate is not at all self-evident. How can a person know right from the start that over and beyond this world of ours which lies open to our investigation there certainly does not exist in reserve another world into which we cannot penetrate easily? Maybe there are different planes of reality that do not necessarily intersect. Maybe some beings exist who exercise their influence upon cosmic actions and reactions only in an accidental sort of way because of a free choice on their part. If God is ceaselessly present in the world to conserve and control it, perhaps He has at His disposal various ways of operating, including one that He uses only on rare occasions.

These are a number of problems which do not at all appear to be absurd if you simply consider what they say. As far as we are concerned, we will examine them and make an effort to render a reasonable solution to these problems.<sup>5</sup> For the time being, we should note the fact that naturalism is not so strikingly clear that it automatically makes these problems vanish and that consequently this doctrine of naturalism is not self-evident nor does it force itself upon the mind as an axiom does. You have to look for reasons to support it.

Then there is the second type of naturalism, the one that tries to prove its claims. Its arguments are identical with

<sup>4</sup> We will examine these objections later when reviewing the agents possibly involved in producing miracles. Cf. below, Chapter IV, Section I, pp. 27 ff.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. below, Chapter IV, Section II, pp. 40 ff.

those of determinism. We shall take them up in the chapter that follows immediately. Spinoza says all things are natural because in its essence reality can only be one. Hume or Renan says that all things are natural because a sufficient induction has established the fact that supernatural activity never interferes with cosmic activities. To grasp the details of these arguments and of the critique which should be urged against them, all the reader has to do is to replace the word or idea of determinism in what follows with that of naturalism.

## CHAPTER II

### DETERMINISM

We are not going to speak here about the type of determinism which denies human freedom.<sup>6</sup> Rather, we shall consider the determinism which will not admit that supernatural agents are capable of modifying the ordinary course of events by exercising their freedom. The basis for such determinism can be either deduction or induction.

#### I. DEDUCTIVE DETERMINISM

One type of strict universal determinism makes necessary the essential law of reality and argues from this necessity to the impossibility of miracles. This determinism consists, therefore, in a thesis from metaphysics plus a simple corollary concerning wonders. This determinism does not level a single objection directly and specifically against wonders. Rather, it excludes them because of a general principle — in the same way, for example, as it excludes free creation. Strictly speaking, we should not take up this type of determinism here. Yet, to make this study a bit more complete, we shall say a few words about one author who adopted this determinism in order to make an open and prolonged attack against miracles. We are speaking of Spinoza.

<sup>6</sup> See Fr. Munnynck's article on "Déterminisme" in the *Dictionnaire Apologétique de la Foi Catholique*, I, 928 ff. (Subsequent references to this source will be indicated by D.A.F.C.)

**EXPOSITION.** According to Spinoza, only one substance exists — the divine substance, with its attributes and its modes. "Particular realities are nothing but modifications of the attributes of God. They are also called modes." The determination of these modes comes from the necessities of the divine essence. Therefore, contingency is banished from reality. Since the laws of nature are the divine decrees and there are no other divine decrees than the very laws of the divine essence, it follows that there are definitely not two types of effects, some attributable to nature and others attributable to some special divine volitions.

This necessity in all things acts as the foundation for our intellectual edifice. Those who advocate miracles topple the edifice by introducing arbitrariness into the world. We need necessity in order to live and think. We need it especially in order to prove the existence of God, because for this proof we must have ideas that are necessary and cannot fail to square with reality. If we thought that some sort of power could modify these ideas, or if we suspected that their exactness might be altered, then our conclusions about God's existence would have no foundation and we could no longer be sure of anything. Consequently, we should give up miracles so we can safeguard our belief in God and the soundness of our own thinking.

**CRITICISM.** We do not have to make a complete investigation of pantheism here. All we have to consider is that aspect of this "system of identity" which touches on miracles. Pantheism excludes miracles for the same reason that it excludes free creation, for in the eyes of the pantheist it is impossible for contingent effects to emanate from a necessary being. However, pantheism is really placing itself in very difficult straits by proposing this type of objection. For according to pantheism, phenomena are ceaselessly changing and disappearing — not indeed as produced effects, but as necessarily connected modes, as phases of an intrinsic evolution, and as natural expressions of some limitless evolution, and as and necessary. This tight unification puts contradiction right at the heart of being.

On the other hand, if a simple relation of cause to effect is set up between the necessary and the contingent, this danger is avoided. For then, the two elements remain distinct; they are no longer just one being, but a plurality of beings. And the relation which is proposed between these beings not only avoids

<sup>7</sup> Cf. below, pp. 39-40.

self-contradiction, but is imperiously demanded by the nature of reality. Actually, events that are passing and variable demand a necessary being as their original source and their indispensable support. In order to give a full explanation of change, a person cannot call a halt at some cause which undergoes change in itself to produce this change; but by further analysis he must actually penetrate to a cause that cannot change. As long as he calls a halt at the first cause he encounters, no ultimate explanation is given, since some explanation has to be given for this cause itself and for the change taking place in it. Consequently, one is forced to place over and above all contingent beings a *primum movens immobile*.

You can see that this entire discussion is moving right back into general metaphysics. We are viewing miracles as a particular case of the relations existing between the finite and the infinite. All we can do here is to remind our reader of the elements of a problem which certainly lies beyond our present scope and which has been thoroughly treated in the articles on "Creation" and "Pantheism."

The objection that miracles would wipe out necessity and therefore do away with the starting point for all our reasoning is founded on an incredible begging of the question. Miracles do not necessarily transform the world into some arbitrary realm where nothing is fixed or certain. A miracle can be viewed as an extremely rare exception that never occurs except for a good reason which has to be evident. Besides this, the miracle will be surrounded by special and very distinctive circumstances that will keep a person from confusing a miracle with any other event. Moreover, if we suppose this exception has taken place, it would never be anything but an *existing fact*. A miracle does not at all detract from first principles or from logical reasonings, since a miracle belongs to a completely different sphere, that of contingent events. The sphere of necessity remains intact and undisturbed. It retains its time-honoured boundaries.<sup>8</sup>

Finally, the miraculous exception itself will have to fulfill several conditions before it can be acknowledged. It could never be some chance event that would turn the general order upside down without regard for anything. Nor could it be some fantasy that has no threads tying it into the texture of reality.

<sup>8</sup> Cf. *D.A.F.C.* I, 722-734; and III, 1303-1333, respectively.

<sup>9</sup> Cf. below, pp. 17 and 39-40.

No, the miraculous exception must fit in harmoniously with the general system of the world.<sup>10</sup> We will see that a person can simultaneously believe in a miracle and God's existence without renouncing his own absolute principles of thought.

## II. INDUCTIVE DETERMINISM

Metaphysical determinism is not nearly so widespread as another type of determinism that appeals to experience and rests upon induction. It is this inductive determinism that is met with everyday. It lies at the bottom of objections coming from historians and the learned who will have nothing to do with miracles. Sometimes it is said that these people reject miracles *a priori*. Such a statement is both true and false. It is true in the sense that these persons believe they possess certitudes that free them from the need of ever examining any particular case to see whether wonders exist. But it is false if understood to mean that these people actually drew these certitudes just from experience. We shall investigate the method that they use.

### *First Type: Induction that claims to produce certainty*

A. *The Direct Objection.* Induction is the reasoning process used to extract a general law from a certain number of cases observed. If applied carefully to a certain number of variety of phenomena, this procedure leads to sufficient number and are certain. It is at the source of all those laws of nature that are confirmed by our daily experience. Now some people claim that this inductive procedure can be applied to the question which miracles. The truth of the matter, so they say, is that nature constantly shows itself to be of one pattern. This has been found true for cases beyond numbering, in circumstances that have been altered in every possible way, and before observers who were as different as could be. Never has the experience of any of them stretched out into some larger sphere of reality or gone farther than this natural world of ours. From these facts, therefore, according to the inductive process, the following legitimate conclusion can be drawn: nature's course unfolds itself in the most uniform of patterns, without leaving room for

<sup>10</sup> Cf. below, Chapter IV, Section II, pp. 40 ff.

any contingency, any miracle. This is the way that Hume, Stuart Mill, Renan, and others argue.<sup>11</sup>

Let us examine this line of thought. What kind of experience are these men speaking about?

Is it the experience gained from *ordinary phenomena*? It is quite true that the only thing revealed to us by an extended experience embracing the farthest reaches of known history is nature's tightly knit and quite imperturbable continuity in the events of this world. If somewhere events take place which seem marvellous, we must admit that they do not come within the scope of the ordinary man's experience. Out of a thousand persons, nine hundred and ninety-nine have never seen any marvellous events and never will see them. But what follows from these facts is the direct contradictory of the conclusion some people draw. Ordinary experience pertains only to events that lie outside our present question. Consequently, ordinary experience is not a suitable source for forming any decision about wonders.

If the mass of mankind were put directly in the presence of facts that appeared marvellous, then their opinion on them would have some weight. But this is not the case. Most men have nothing upon which to base their induction except events that do not even appear to be marvellous. And therefore, of what value is an opinion they may form about events that are different? The truths which this induction from common sense does establish are that there exists an ordinary course of events which is constant for all practical purposes, that prudence bids us live and think as if miracles were never going to sprout up along our path, and that, practically speaking, "they don't happen."

On the other hand, wonders and miracles are known precisely as exceptions, as anomalies that are extremely rare and practically negligible as far as the ordinary course of life goes. These wonders and miracles presuppose uniformity as the regular thing. Thus ordinary experience furnishes them with that precise circumstance which they must have if they are going to be recognized. It offers, to speak figuratively, the dull backdrop against which these wonders, if existent, will stand out in brilliant contrast. But about the wonders themselves, ordinary experience has nothing to say, either pro or con. Ordinary experience works within a sector of reality

<sup>11</sup> Texts and references will be found in the author's *Introduction*, pp. 38 ff.

where wonders are, by supposition, not to be found.

Consequently, what must be investigated are the *phenomena which at least give the appearance of being wonders*. Only experience that centers on such phenomena is of any value in our present question. Now does such experience offer any basis for a sound inductive argument against miracles?

*Erroneous induction.* Let us not forget that if a person fails to sift out from these phenomena certain natural influences, the result will be an illegitimate generalization. No longer will there be an induction, but only an instance of the common sophism: *ab uno or a quibusdam disce omnes*. (From one case or from several, you can figure out what all the cases are like.) Renan made this mistake by reasoning in the following way: the prodigies reported by Livy and Pausanias were make-believe; therefore, the same holds true for Gospel miracles; and these latter should be rejected without examination. Renan also believed that three references to the *Gazette des Tribunaux* were sufficient to bolster his statement that "no present-day miracle stands up under examination."<sup>12</sup> Such procedure is a bit superficial.

*Correct induction.* a) *its positive task: to discover the causes.*

If we proceed in a more mature fashion, can we not use induction to extract some certainties? For example, I make a collection of quite a large number of cases in which, despite the great variety of circumstances, the people's belief in a miracle is explained by fraud, ignorance, credulity, or excited imagination. I notice that when these factors are present, legends about miracles sprout forth spontaneously, and that these aforementioned factors are realized more readily in proportion as the legends evolve so much the more readily in proportion as the observations I induce a general law: there is a natural causal connection between credulity and ignorance and the acceptance of prodigies. *Posita causa ponitur effectus; variata causa variatur effectus.* (When the cause is in operation, the effect follows; when the cause is altered, the variation is reflected in the effect.) In this way my induction arrives at a positive conclusion which is unassailable.

So far, so good. But this conclusion does not at all mean that wonders are impossible. That ignorance or credulity may often lie at the bottom of belief in wonders no one denies. But what has to be ascertained is whether ignorance or credulity

<sup>12</sup> Cf. *Introduction*, pp. 41 and 44.

are always at the bottom of such a belief, and whether they alone are present — in other words, whether with these factors we are in possession of the solution which alone covers all the cases. Up until now, it has not been proved that some other factor — for example, the actual occurrence of wonders — could not substitute for ignorance and credulity in producing this belief. The third law of experimental reasoning has not been applied: *sublata causa tollitur effectus*. (If the cause is removed, the effect ceases.)

The close connection between causes and effects is not always reciprocal, even on the plane of physical phenomena. And from the fact that some particular cause never fails to bring about some particular effect, it does not follow that this effect could not possibly stem from any other cause. Take the objection just presented as an instance of this. Have we not already seen that excited imagination and fraud — which are perfectly distinct antecedents — both tend to produce exactly the same result; namely, belief? And it has not at all been proved that this belief could not possibly arise from still different sources. The same thing occurs in other spheres where ignorance, credulity, and so on, play their part in the origin of belief. But this does not prevent objective truth from simultaneously playing its own role. Men give too ready a credence to fictitious tales because they make a mistake or because someone deceives them; but there are also times when they believe for sound reasons, because they have solid grounds for belief. What reason is there for saying that the same thing does not hold true in this question of wonders?

*Correct induction:* b) *its negative task: to exclude causes.*

The positive results of this induction are not far-reaching enough to wipe out the possibility of wonders. But there is a negative role which induction can play. It is capable of pointing out not only what is at work but also what is not at work. At times induction can definitely eliminate certain phenomena from the class of possible causes. For example, it is through induction that we learn that an oak tree never sprouts up from a grain of wheat and that hydrochloric acid will never be obtained by making oxygen react upon carbon. In like manner, why should induction not be able to teach us that no true supernatural fact is ever the source of belief in wonders?

There is no parallel between the examples just mentioned and our question about wonders. In the examples induction works upon several pairs of data, and experience supplies the induction with both terms of these pairs. But in the case of

wonders, as the objection presents it, induction gains hold of just one of the terms. We know experimentally what an oak tree is and what a grain of wheat is, and that is why we can deal with certainty that certain relations exist between them. On the other hand, when we are treating of wonders and of belief in wonders, it is taken for granted that belief is the only term we experience. Therefore, we cannot decide directly about its relations to some other term that lies beyond our experience.

I admit that induction succeeds indirectly in eliminating the unknown element. But this occurs only in cases where the induction finds some known factor to take the place of the unknown element. For example, I know that water never fails to result every time I unite oxygen, hydrogen, and an electric spark in a test-tube. Therefore, these antecedents themselves are sufficient to bring about the result. When they are present, it is useless to look beyond them for some explanation of the phenomena. In such a case the experimenter is not at all tempted to attribute the origin of the water to the influence of some planets or to some unknown cause whose action has remained hidden.<sup>13</sup> Why? Because the spot is taken, the sufficient reason has been found, the other circumstances and the unknown element itself have been set aside as superfluous, without having to bother about them directly.

Now in all this there is nothing resembling an all-inclusive rejection of wonders that is based on the experience of several instances of error and fraud. When applied to our subject, this present procedure simply proves that there is no need of having recourse to a supernatural cause when an adequate natural explanation has been found — and this is a platitude. Wonders will be indirectly eliminated each time that adequate natural causality is proved to be present. This is the only truth that follows, and it is little enough.

Consequently, induction does not lead to any decisive conclusion opposing the wonderful. This is because induction actually is not concerned with questions of possibility or impossibility. What it is concerned with is *factual regularity*. It does not say, "This phenomenon must always necessarily accompany or follow that other phenomenon"; but rather, "this phenomenon does accompany or follow that other phenomenon when the desired conditions are fulfilled." Induction does not

<sup>13</sup> For the detailed argumentation that makes this conclusion certain, cf. *Introduction*, p. 59.

know whether unknown agents can change, impede, or substitute for the activity of those agents which it has discovered.

### B. *The Indirect Objection: the anti-scientific results of admitting wonders.*

Some people think that admitting miracles is incompatible with experimental science. The existence and success of experimental science are founded on observation and induction, and this science constitutes an enormous accomplishment which cannot be ignored. However, the central core of the science so constructed is the principle of determinism. This principle assumes that "the conditions of existence for every phenomenon are determined in an absolute manner." Put in other words, this means that once the condition of a phenomenon has been discovered and fulfilled, then the phenomenon must always necessarily be reproduced at the experimenter's good-pleasure. To deny this principle would be tantamount to denying the existence of science itself." — Claude Bernard. "Every prediction is an impertinence, if there is an unsettled force that can modify the laws of the universe at its whim..." — Renan.<sup>14</sup>

At this point there is need for us to treat of a gross misrepresentation of the thesis under attack. A person can accept miracles without having them occur everywhere. Most people who believe in miracles consider them as rare exceptions that are likely to occur only in certain circumstances and then never without good reasons which a careful investigation can discover. The opposition, however, assumes that miracles are likely to occur everywhere at all times. People point to them in churches and on pilgrimages; and that is reason enough, so they say, for being on the look-out for them in the laboratories.

Since there can be no exception to a rule unless first there is a rule, the idea of a miracle presupposes the idea of that habitual constancy in nature's way of acting which is the object of experimental science. The opposition, however, assumes that a miracle destroys all order in the universe. This amounts to saying that a single exemption, which suspends the law in just one case among billions and trillions of similar cases, destroys the law itself. It even means that this single exemption could keep people from seeing the law operate ordinarily thereafter or from being able to predict the law's application with a practically infallible certainty!

<sup>14</sup> Cf. below, pp. 39-40.



*Second Type: Induction proceeding from simple conjectures*

According to Matthew Arnold, it must be conceded that no complete and rigorous inductive argument exists against miracles. Nevertheless, he feels that there are indications pointing in this direction and that these are constantly becoming stronger. Just as men are becoming more educated and more critical, so the explanations which rely upon wonders are becoming fewer and fewer. Is this itself not an indication that wonders will eventually disappear?

We will break down this objection into two clearly distinct parts. The first will concern those *real events, once considered miraculous*, which *scientific criticism* has put back in their place. The second part of the objection will embrace *miraculous events, once considered real*, which *historical criticism* has found to be fictitious.

*First Part.* a) It would be quite a task to discuss the basis of the first part of the objection, for certain authors have made it as wide as they pleased to fit the needs of their own case. Loisy (using the pen-name of Firmin) and Renan inform us of a certain period in history when men were in the habit of seeing miracles everywhere, when the notion of an order in nature had not even entered their minds. Such a statement is marked with a great deal of make-believe, because the people of ancient times, for all their credulity, were nevertheless accustomed to distinguish between a prodigy and the ordinary course of events.

The proof of this fact lies in the attention itself which they gave to a prodigy and in the care which they took in noting it down. For example, both in the Bible as well as in the classical historians the course of ordinary events was presupposed; and generally it was quite a rare occasion for wonders to break in upon this procedure. Moreover, a very large number of events which the ancient writers presented as extraordinary would still deserve such a classification if they actually occurred. And lastly, we still have to find out whether the wonders rejected by modern scientific criticism were rejected according to correct procedure. Surely no one will ask us to accept such a verdict without examination and merely on the say-so of the objectors. Even the most radical naturalists openly admit the inaccuracy and at times the ridiculousness of some of the explanations excogitated by their predecessors in naturalism.

It follows that it would be completely unreasonable to mine in advance that the natural explanations, which have been put forth in such profusion, are not open to examination. We must see how much these explanations are worth. And since we

are using the inductive method in handling this problem, the only way we have of discovering their worth is to examine the explanations one by one when they are brought up to explain the facts. Such an examination is the only one that can give us the information, and neither we nor anyone else has the right to anticipate the results of this examination here and now. The person who keeps these various remarks in mind will find the basis for the objection shrinking considerably. The number of events that formerly were considered as miraculous but now are indisputably held to be historical and natural will no longer appear so vast to him. Above all, the hypothesis about wonders being *found everywhere in primitive times* will appear in the light of history to be a pure fiction.

b) But even if all the premises of this objection were valid, no decisive conclusion would follow. Actually, they presuppose that the wonderful is not completely explained, for past explanations are only adduced as indications of future explanations which have not yet been found. Now it is impossible to conclude from these former to the latter.

Just because a large number of cases have been solved, it does not follow either with certitude or even with positive probability that the other cases are going to be solved, and solved in the same way. For maybe these cases will be different. Here is that "maybe" which keeps the whole problem in suspense and it cannot be removed except by metaphysics. This "maybe" springs up from the facts themselves, because if they are the only thing we look at, we could just as easily make up an hypothesis contrary to the one proposed to us. If energized reagents have attacked some residue and it has not become liquid, perhaps this is because of the solidity of the residue. And if certain chemical elements offer resistance to the very same methods that were used successfully on other elements, apparently this is because these elements are different. With probability on either side, each man will pick that probability which pleases him more. However, their mutual opposition will keep the conjectures from becoming fixed either in one sense or in the other.

*Second Part.* The efforts of historical criticism have been far more successful than those of scientific criticism. The chief way by which it has disposed of many wondrous events is that of calling into question the testimony connected with these events. Later on we will give a detailed evaluation of the principles and the method which guided these efforts. Here and now we find no difficulty in acknowledging the beneficial

results of a large number of its findings.

However, there are no grounds at all for assuming that some day this historical criticism will make wonders disappear completely. For the refining activity of criticism has disappeared in a good number of other fields, and no one dreams of predicting that criticism will suppress those fields completely. There have been legends that contained purely natural events as well as those that contained wondrous. Amazing feats have been invented, transactions of tremendous import have been imagined, and striking historical utterances have been devised. And the number of natural facts that have been scientifically established has decreased all along the line. But does this mean that some day we must cancel out the whole of history? Granted that some of the witticisms of Henry IV are not his own. Does this mean that he never uttered any at all? Granted that historical criticism has cut down their number. Does this give us ground for suspecting that his other witticisms are just as likely to disappear?

To summon onto the stage some unreal future objections that are considered to be as valid as genuine objections though here and now they are nothing but pure non-entities, even a critical method that is a bit ridiculous. Such a technique could be applied to anything. And if it were, we would have to distrust everything that we hold for certain; for we would tell ourselves that although this is the way we actually see the thing here and now, perhaps there may arise some unsuspected objection in the future that will ruin everything. This would be universal scepticism. People can adopt such a course; but if they do, they should admit the fact instead of bringing up a specific objection against wonders.

### CHAPTER III

## THE PHILOSOPHIES OF CONTINGENCY AND CONTINUITY

The philosophies of contingency and continuity take their stand as the direct opposites of determinism. Instead of rejecting miracles, these systems embrace them, but only in order to have miracles melt into a milieu amid the other phenomena where all differences of species and even all individual

characteristics cease to exist. If every event is just as unexpected and continuous as every other event, then miracles can no longer stand out either as free actions or as distinct facts.

If the system of contingency were taken in its radical form and pushed to its limits, it would rule out the idea of continuity and would consist in imagining the universe as a chaotic ensemble of events without dependence, without connection, and without order. Under this reign of non-coherent change, anything could follow anything whatsoever; and hence, nothing would be particularly miraculous. But the experience gained through centuries — yes, that very experience upon which we saw determinism trying to build — sharply contradicts this paradoxical dream which no philosopher has adopted. We can pass by such a system.

However, if the doctrine is worked out philosophically, it will keep the ideas of continuity and contingency closely connected and draw converging arguments from them. Such a brand of philosophy is particularly noticeable in two Christian thinkers who have made it the basis for their theories about miracles; namely, Maurice Blondel and Edouard LeRoy. In this paper we cannot analyze the thought of these men in all its nuances and variations. We have made this detailed study elsewhere and take the liberty of referring the reader to this work in justification of the assertions we are going to make.<sup>15</sup>

**EXPOSITION.** While differing about some items that we will omit here, the two authors just mentioned agree substantially upon the following ideas which are the starting points for their entire critique of miracles.

1. *Contingency.* Reality is unending novelty, ceaseless variation. Reality never repeats itself exactly. No two events are perfectly similar. The uniform laws which pretend to represent nature only paint a false picture. The way these laws are formulated is by passing by each non-useful or uninteresting item. These laws are a convenient norm for action, but they are not accurate from a speculative viewpoint. — When such a position is taken, the notion of miracle (at least as it is understood here) vanishes in thin air. Since uniformity and determinism are nowhere to be found, a real exception is obviously unthinkable.

<sup>15</sup> See *La notion de vérité dans la "philosophie nouvelle,"* 1908. — *Dieu dans "l'Evolution créatrice,"* 1912. (Or *Etudes*, March 5, 1908, and February 20, 1912.) — *Immanence: essai critique sur la doctrine de M. Maurice Blondel*, 1913; and lastly, *Introduction à l'étude du merveilleux et du miracle*, 1916. Cf. also the Note at the close of this chapter, pp. 25-26.

2. *Continuity.* All being is bound together. No being can be set apart from the whole without losing its true aspect. "Piecemealing" is first brought in by the senses and the intellect since they make us view separately what in reality is one. Knowing is thus a deforming operation. Consequently, a miracle does not exist as a deforming operation. Consequently, a valid argument. Moreover, any special argument is itself a "piecemealing," and this for two reasons: first, because it consists of abstract ideas; and secondly, just because it is something special and considered as valid in itself. Hence, it is impossible to conclude to a divine intervention by starting from wonders and miracles.

**CRITIQUE. 1. Contingency.** a) Reducing everything to contingency is just as much an insult to sound judgment as reducing everything to determinism. Willy-nilly we find ourself in the presence of two elements in this world, neither of which can absorb the other. The free activity of men does cut across the path of nature; and whatever be the metaphysical opinion which people may devise about the one or the other, still, as far as experience goes, it is impossible to confuse these two elements. It is in experience that these two phenomena are different and discernible. Consequently, if some free activity besides our own should intervene here below, it would be just as discernible as our own.

When people start high-lighting the diversity of detail among physical phenomena as well as the continual variations in it and the suddenness of its unexpected events (all of which make it difficult to form a sure and accurate prediction about them), they are not at all demonstrating the "contingency" of these phenomena, but merely showing how extremely complicated is the determinism of these things. There is no analogy between them and free activities, and it is only playing with words when the same label is used to confuse such completely different realities. If it is difficult to predict physical phenomena down to the last detail, and if there are even times when the prediction is completely false, it nevertheless remains true that the man who sticks to the ordinary cases and the substance of the facts finds that the actual results are really those he expected. The expert makes mistakes in his forecasts, but not the mistakes he would make if he were dealing with wills capable of freedom and caprice. When the expert thinks something out according to what he calls his "laws," his conclusions are usually correct, and error will be an accident here. On the other hand, when a prophecy about free future actions is fulfilled,

people signal it out as a rare exception, as a very unlikely occurrence. These are different cases, and all that has been said shows how reality is divided into two clearly distinct zones whose boundaries it would be foolish to erase.

b) Scientific "laws" are not purely arbitrary constructs. They depend upon two elements and the devotees of contingency tend to forget about the second. These two elements are the convenience of expression and the data to be expressed. The expression can follow convention and thus symbolize reality instead of representing it. The starting point for science and the plotting of its course have been conditioned by chance circumstances and practical conventions. But none of these things prevents reality from being expressed through some sort of language or signs. Approach it any way you want -- you will not be so much in command as to see in it whatever you want.

To be specific, there exists an objective basis for the uniformity of laws; namely, the mutual similarity of phenomena. While every event is an "exceptional case" in certain aspects, still in many other aspects it remains quite ordinary. Nature has her own customs, and all one has to do is open his eyes to see that she rarely breaks them. It is legitimate to group these similarities under a single formula. Those men who prescind from these similarities so they can look just at the differences are deforming reality as much as those who look only at its similarities. If a person follows Blondel and LeRoy and strips thought and observation of all cognitive value, it is logical to throw out the idea of a stable regular nature as if it were some sort of false god. However, this ultimate rejection, which sweeps miracles along with it, is nothing but a simple corollary of a general theory concerning the value of the mind's operations; and it is not our task to study such a matter here.<sup>16</sup>

c) What is less paradoxical and more to the point is the objection drawn from the instability of scientific hypotheses. How can we accept that uniformity in nature which is the necessary foundation for miracles when the "laws," which were recognized for a while, are later on incessantly modified by new discoveries?

Now let us weigh the meaning of the fact just alleged. Nature surely has not made a complete revelation of itself to men.

<sup>16</sup> We made this study in *La notion de vérité*, pp. 61 ff.; and especially in *Immanence*, Part II, Chapter 2. Cf. also, *Introduction*, pp. 113 ff.

The knowledge we acquire about nature moves forward and grows deeper, becomes more precise and undergoes correction — as is true of all our knowledge. However, what is discovered fits into the same category as what was already known, the new is like the old. Scientists correct the "law of Mariotte," but by means of new "laws." The regularity of events is more deeply understood, but it is always regularity that is understood. In all of this there is nothing that resembles freedom or arbitrariness; if there were, it would cut across everything else.

2. *Continuity.* Again there is a general philosophy and a whole theory of the world implied in the objection which is inspired by the principle of continuity. The objection implies that everything lies within everything else; or at least, that of these difficulties here for they lie far beyond the scope of this article and even beyond that of apologetics. Without furnishing the whole argument, we shall confine ourselves to the following statements of things we have proved elsewhere: The principle of continuity or of universal interdependence is neither self-evident nor deduced from self-evident premises.

Experience does not force us to see in every phenomenon the influence of all other phenomena.<sup>17</sup> Rather, the contrary is true; for experience shows us certain boundaries between events and objects which sometimes are poorly defined and sometimes are clear-cut.

In this world there are complete series of phenomena which act toward each other as if they were complete strangers. Even in an object which is changing, there is some element that every alteration of the slightest element generates throughout the whole unit still leave subsisting in a clearly recognizable way the substance of the other elements.

And even among phenomena joined together by influences that are deep and real, certain antecedents can be replaced by others without causing any corresponding change in what follows.

Lastly, a partial cognition does have some value and does not necessarily deform reality.<sup>18</sup> Consequently, a person can consider certain facts separately and base distinct arguments upon them without deviating from the truth.

<sup>17</sup> Cf. *Immanence*, Part II, Chapter 1.  
<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 71 ff.

"The constructive ideas in Le Roy's theory"

In the course of this study, we will encounter several specific objections from Le Roy which do not pertain essentially to the philosophy of contingency and which we had no occasion to consider in that connection. As far as the constructive part of his theory goes, we have also left it outside this study because it is only a modernized version of naturalism. However, since it has enjoyed a certain popularity during its day, we add a brief analysis of it in this note.

For Le Roy, as well as for his teacher, Bergson, there is at the source of this world one single current of life. From this current proceed both spirit and matter, but matter is derivative and spirit is primary.<sup>20</sup> Therefore, a hidden liberty lies at the bottom of everything. This liberty does not succeed in manifesting itself completely except in man. However, the contrivances and ceaseless variations of nature are also the attempts it is making at gaining freedom — attempts which are more or less held in check. A miracle is one of nature's rare successes. The spirit, which is the primary source and the lawful master of bodies, ordinarily does not accomplish with them what it wishes. It is only at rare intervals, when the spirit is raised up, so to speak, to a level of higher power by the influence of religious faith, that it flashes out upon the world with unexpected achievements. The spirit's mastery and its creative power suddenly assert themselves, and then everything subsides into calm and routine.

In this theory you can see that it is the natural and innate energy of the spirit which comes to the fore in a miracle. God's power does not operate apart from secondary causes or in a way superior to them. It is faith which works the cure — faith that is viewed not as a moral fitness, nor as a preparation for heavenly favors, nor as a meriting activity on the soul's part, but as the direct producer of some profound physical change. And the effectiveness of this faith depends more

<sup>19</sup> Translator's note: In the original article Fr. de Tonquédec also included a note on the interpretation of the writing of Blondel. This note does not seem needed in the English translation. In it Fr. de Tonquédec showed Blondel's views to be in a state of flux and stated that he was criticizing Blondel's original positions.

<sup>20</sup> See *Introduction*, pp. 89 ff., for the details of this idea which cannot be explained in a few lines.

upon its intensity, on its capacity of injecting a physiological jolt, than upon its own perfection. Faith works out into its consequences inevitably, just as some "force of nature" does.

Such a theory does not contain any *a priori* difficulty against miracles, beyond those of naturalism and determinism. Once these two have been set aside, the only thing to be done is to wait for the investigation of the facts. This is the way to find out what cure faith has worked and whether it is not a caprice devoid of all likelihood which credits faith with such prodigies as a resurrection, a multiplication of loaves, or a walking on the waters.<sup>21</sup>

#### CHAPTER IV

### THE ATTITUDE WHICH SHOULD BE ADOPTED: NATURAL EXPLANATIONS AND SUPERNATURAL EXPLANATIONS

Now that we have discarded the prejudices that seemed to force themselves upon us in this question of wonders, we still have to indicate the attitude we are going to adopt in studying this question. It will be the attitude which is least exclusive. We shall not reject *a priori* any plausible explanation, principle that might solve the question. It is possible that the wondrous events people talk about may be fictitious. It is possible that science may have furnished acceptable explanations for these events. It is even possible that the activity of the unknown natural forces may at first sight look like free supernatural interventions — later on we will see whether a person can distinguish these latter from the former.<sup>22</sup> However, the one thing we shall not do is to decree right from the start that the explanations just mentioned are adequate for every case.

Thus, without further ado, we throw open the question of supernatural explanations. Among these explanations, the first to come to mind and the one around which the most important argument turns is the explanation based upon God — upon a personal God, who is intelligent, free, and the sovereign

<sup>21</sup> See Appendix II of *Introduction*.

<sup>22</sup> Cf. below, pp. 54-58.

master of the world. Many people admit His existence while rejecting miracles. Several doctrinal systems claim to prove God's existence without appealing to any revelation. We presuppose that this proof has been given.<sup>23</sup> Hence, our present task is to show how miracles fit into a theistic system. We will do this first by solving difficulties (Section I), and then by adducing positive arguments (Section II). Far from using miracles as a starting point for proving the existence of God, our chief task is quite the contrary; namely, to maintain that miracles are possible against those who base their denial of it upon the existence of God and His attributes.

### SECTION I: THE OBJECTIONS AGAINST GOD'S INTERVENTION IN THIS WORLD<sup>24</sup>

First Objection: *Miracles lower God to the level of a secondary cause.*

Proposed by Sabatier, Tyrrell, and Loisy.

Several theorists about religious matters do not want God to show Himself in certain historical events more especially than in others. They think that for Him this would be leaving the plane of the Absolute and entering that of the relative, descending from the Infinite to the finite. Such a change of rank, such a lowering of Himself appears to them quite logically as a contradiction and an absurdity. If God intervened in a miracle, it would make Him "a particular cause among phenomena like the other causes." — Sabatier. "By a kind of self-limitation, God would leave His position of first and final cause and take the place of some secondary finite cause." — Tyrrell.

<sup>23</sup> See the article, "Dieu," *D.A.F.C.*, I, 941 ff.

<sup>24</sup> In the examination of these objections, we shall mention the possible answers of those who favor miracles, without as yet speaking in a definitive manner. Our aim is to show that the objections are without force, rather than to expound some system. Consequently, the assertions made here are made on a temporary and hypothetical basis. Throughout this section there is a condition understood, which runs as follows: "if there are, on other grounds, positive reasons for admitting miracles in principle." It is only after we have presented those positive reasons that the ideas mentioned here will take on their full significance. (N.B. References to the original sources of these eight objections will be found on the last two pages of the Bibliography. — Transl.)

All these remarks do not exactly hit the point maintained by those advocating miracles. For these do not really suppose that God leaves His position of first cause to lower Himself to the role of a secondary cause. On the contrary, they claim that God preserves His normal essential role; and that *even in so far as He takes the place of secondary causes, He does not act as a secondary cause.* There can be no question of setting up some equality between a secondary cause, which never does anything but make use of energy that has come from elsewhere, and the first cause, which is the unique source of its own energy. It is true that a miracle, as the term of God's activity, is a fact among other facts; but this does not make its cause enter into the fabric of phenomena or into the interplay of cosmic elements. This cause remains or into the always inaccessible to experience and mysterious.

Moreover, according to the hypothesis of those advocating miracles, the miraculous fact itself, by reason of its structure and its extraordinary surroundings, allows one to conclude that it is not like other facts and that it depends upon the first cause in a special way. This special dependence upon the first its proceeding immediately from God and doing without the ordinary intermediaries. For the objection to be valid, it would have to be proved that the First Being could exert His influence in only one way; namely, through secondary causes. This is the point which the objection neither proves nor can prove without formally contradicting its own presuppositions. For whoever admits, when faced with created activities, that there is a God who is Creator and Lord, is forced to admit two types of activity in God: the immediate activity of creation or of the donation of being, in which there is no intermediary that collaborates; and the mediate activity, which consists in obtaining a result by activating secondary causes. Miracles are similar to the first type of activity.

Second Objection: *Miracles imply changeableness and weakness in God.*

Proposed by Voltaire, Anatole France, and others.

This objection supposes that the purpose of miracles is to correct various physical defects in the world. "God could not disturb His machine except to make it run better." — Voltaire. "The ponderous machine needs... the helping hand of its maker." — Anatole France. Moreover, the objection supposes that God

changes His ideas; that after having fashioned the world in accord with a certain plan, He changes His mind so He can introduce some modifications. We are presented with a ridiculous picture of a God who determines to "change His eternal ideas" (Voltaire), so as to make several "timid retouchings" (Anatole France) from time to time upon His work.

All these ideas are perfectly absurd. If there are some people who mix such childish fancies into their idea of miracles, we should pity them. But no sensible mind with even the slightest philosophical training will pause over such ideas. Why limit the purpose of miracles to the physical? Can they not be conceived as ordered to higher and strictly moral ends? It is not a question of making a machine run better; but, for example, of making men attentive to some divine revelation. Miracles do not take up some task that creation would have failed to carry out; no, they begin another undertaking — one that is completely different. Miracles are the contact point between two orders, the place where a higher order makes its entry into the natural order.

And what naive anthropomorphism it is to imagine that some new and distinctive event demands a change of plan on God's part or a succession of different ideas! Just as God, by means of a single infinite decree that is identified with His essence, chooses the countless variety of beings and laws, so by one and the same eternal design He wills both the order in nature and the miraculous exceptions. It is only the two end-products that are different. They are equally contingent, equally subordinated, coming from the contrast. They are *between themselves* that they form the contrast. They are opposed to each other, they follow each other, and the one changes into the other. However, neither the order of nature nor the miraculous exception is opposed to any kind of divine choice. Neither the one nor the other presupposes on God's part some special choice which might be a sufficient reason for the one but not for the other, and against which some other choice might be opposed.

Third Objection: *Miracles imply a lack of wisdom or dignity in God.*

Proposed by Voltaire, Seailles, and others.

Everything connected with a miracle is cheap. First of all, the end is ignoble. The people who benefit by it are just a few individuals picked out at random; or at most, the human race,

which is pretty much like "one little ant-hill" in this vast universe, as Voltaire puts it. There is no proportion at all between an interruption of the cosmic order and such trivial concerns.

Moreover, the means employed in miracles are not any loftier either. As Seailles says, they are a few unhappy "snags inserted arbitrarily" by God in the magnificent order that He Himself has established. Or they are a couple of cures that succeeded here and there — successes that are ridiculously meager when compared to the innumerable cures that human medicine brings about every day. Now things like these are unworthy of God's dignity and His wisdom.

As with the preceding objection, these difficulties betray a complete misconception of miracles. Here again, the moral nature of miracles and the purpose assigned to them by those favoring miracles are completely forgotten. The "snags" that were mentioned are ennobled by their sublimity. The "snags" that structure of humanity, its moral betterment, and its sanctification are not ignoble goals. There is no question of God's competing with medical science, or of His outdoing the therapeutic powers of nature which He Himself created, but rather of His speaking to souls. Moreover, the instantaneous and majestic manner with which God brings about this sensible achievement and even those imprints of absolute sovereignty that He stamps upon His work by "arbitrarily" choosing His own moments and the recipients of His favors are all characterized by a touch of independence that is in keeping with the Most Perfect Freedom.

One isolated individual or even the whole human race certainly is a trifle if their material mass is compared with the universe. But are we concerned with mass here? "When man shall have been wiped out by the universe, he will still be nobler than the thing that killed him. . . ." And people understand that what especially attracts the gaze of the "Father of souls" is spiritual values, which are of greater interest to Him than the whole material universe. Of course, neither an individual soul nor all souls taken together ever merit God's tender care. There is nothing in God's eyes which has a *dignity* previous to His own choice. We must give up trying to find among finite beings an object *measuring up* to the action of the Infinite. Nevertheless, people realize that if creatures cannot bring themselves up to God's level, His condescension can stoop down towards them. There is nothing so trivial that it is overlooked by Limitless Intelligence; there is no moral action

without meaning for Absolute Justice; there is nothing too low for Eternal Mercy and Love. That explains why God can lavish excessive care on areas which are sometimes so tiny; those are some of the reasons which can make an extraordinary intervention by God seem plausible *a priori*, whether that intervention works in favor of all mankind or just in relation to some privileged souls.

Fourth Objection: *The testimony of experience weakens the probability of a divine intervention.*  
Proposed by Hume and Stuart Mill.

We have seen<sup>25</sup> that Hume and Stuart Mill used induction against miracles. Their line of reasoning has nothing special about it except that, by using a manoeuvre aimed at embarrassing believers, they introduce determinism as a rule of God's government rather than as a simple natural law. This does not change the core of the difficulty at all.

What is novel here are the other controversial propositions in which Stuart Mill clothes the difficulty. With an eye well-trained in logic, he has caught sight of the precise point where he must strike the argument of his adversaries to immobilize it. He spends all his efforts on devaluating the very type of proofs brought up against him. Here is how he proceeds.<sup>26</sup>

1. First of all, he says that the regular concatenation of phenomena, upon which determinism is based, is an object of experience. But the possibility or the reality of a divine intervention can only rest on a "speculative inference" — an operation which is far less immediate and therefore less sure.

*Reply.* a) It is false to say that deterministic naturalism does not employ speculative inferences and limits itself to the simple registration of facts. It, too, does its reasoning, and a good deal of it.

First of all, even if naturalism is seeking for nothing but invariable antecedents, for all its referring to them as "causes," nevertheless, it is not brute experience that will supply it with these antecedents. Stuart Mill himself has formulated the logical rules for isolating such antecedents from the amorphous

<sup>25</sup> In Chapter II, pp. 12-13.

<sup>26</sup> A serious difficulty arises about the meaning Stuart Mill gives to the word "cause." In *Introduction*, pp. 151 ff., we have shown that it must be taken in an ontological sense if the very objections of Stuart Mill are to have any meaning.

mass of facts. It is a question of *interpreting* experience, of discovering in the phenomena some connecting bonds that are necessary, some consequences that are unfailing or "unconditional" as Stuart Mill would say. Now this whole process is not completed simply by opening one's eyes. To put it briefly, this whole operation consists in making the experimental data fit into certain "speculative" forms.

But if the word cause is given its full meaning of an efficacious and determining antecedent — and this occurs quite frequently in the sciences<sup>27</sup> — then metaphysics itself comes into play. Causality is always *reached by inference, discovered by thought*. It is never seen and touched by the senses or grasped by instruments.

Finally, since the discussion is here concerned with phenomena that appear to be wonders — that is, phenomena which by hypothesis *have no natural cause that is apparent here and now* — it is necessary for all of us, whether determinists or not, to seek for the explanation outside of experience since Mill and the others are doing when, instead of going back to God, they propose for our acceptance some natural *hidden* cause. This is admitting that since experience is silent, some inferences and some speculation must be called upon to come to a decision.

b) True enough, they will say; but nonetheless, the reasoning which concludes to some natural hidden cause is the one which separates us least from experience. This cause which we imagine has the advantage of being similar to the causes we observe. It is modeled after them and someday may show itself among them and like to them. But God, on the contrary, is always and essentially an extra-experimental Being.

All right, but these remarks in no way establish the procedure which is *more immediate* than inference. Let us confuse the goal and the path to the goal. It is by a reasoning process that they are trying to prove the superiority of the concept which they patterned after experience. Let us not process has no right at all to pass for an "experimental" process. It is useless to wish to identify it — I shall not say with ordinary experience — but with the logical operations that are applied to experience and render an interpretation of it. In this situation we are undoubtedly in the realm of the abstract.

<sup>27</sup> Cf. *Introduction*, pp. 59 and 153.

When people reject or classify as doubtful everything that is unobtainable by observation, they are being guided by an *a priori* element that belongs to a strictly metaphysical order. It is by setting up a critique of cognition, by establishing a hierarchy among our faculties, and then by choosing from the data furnished by these faculties that people make the value of experience come to the fore. They make use of ideas of certitude, of error, and of truth. They employ metaphysics and "criteriology." Now if all these mental operations do not comprise a group of "speculative inferences," I wonder where the phrase will be used. Stuart Mill's philosophy, even when applied to miracles, is not science. Like all philosophies, it is a doctrine which rises above and beyond science. And consequently, it has nothing more "immediate" about it than its rivals have.

It should be added that Mill's philosophy is also a particularly fine example of sophistic speculation. If a person draws up into form the propositions which Stuart Mill directed against miracles, he will arrive at some genuine monstrosities of logic. Here are some samples from which to judge:

Experience teaches us that phenomena exist which are certainly natural but whose cause is unknown; therefore, every phenomenon whose cause is unknown is natural.<sup>28</sup>

Experience is a more immediate operation than inference; this fact gives experience sufficient grounds for reducing the value of inference to nil and for doing away with its conclusions.

2. But even if a person admits the value of speculative inference in general, he can still take issue with that particular argumentation which claims to prove the existence of miracles. This is what Stuart Mill does. According to him, this argumentation runs into two difficulties. The first is that there is always a probability that some hidden natural cause is present. The second is that our knowledge of God's activity in the universe leaves us in doubt about the compatibility of miracles with His attributes.

Later on we shall see<sup>29</sup> whether and how and where the unknown natural cause can be excluded with certainty. As far as God's attributes go, the question breaks down into two parts.

a) God's *goodness* and *omnipotence* are put forward by believers to show that miracles are probable *a priori*. But Stuart Mill notes that the very facts, which are supposed to

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 160 f.

<sup>29</sup> Cf. below in Section II, pp. 54-58.



manifest this goodness and power, actually render them so much the more doubtful. Indeed, everyone agrees that miracles are a rare exception. How does it happen that miracles show itself so stingily? Why should a Power without bounds confine itself to such narrow limits?

On this subject we shall content ourselves with pointing out the fact that the questions raised here lead back to a far wider problem which is taken up in theodicy; namely, the problem of the boundaries which Sovereign Liberty sets to its exterior activity and the problem of the evil which it allows to exist without remedying it. These problems lie beyond our present scope.<sup>30</sup>

b) The way in which Divine Wisdom governs the universe furnishes Stuart Mill with a separate argument. It is a fact, says Mill, that we see God acting ordinarily by means of secondary causes, according to the normal course of events. Therefore, if He wished mankind to embrace certain doctrines, He ought to have arranged causes and natural events towards this end, rather than act just by Himself in some miraculous way. Hence, one can hold, for example, that God caused Christianity to bloom at its proper time as the full-flowering of the development of the human spirit, that God caused the development of the human spirit, rather than that He sought to impose it upon men by strokes of prodigy.

Such an hypothesis is the direct negation of the idea of revelation. If God wishes to reveal to men a doctrine containing some mystery, or even if He wishes to endow certain natural truths with His own authority in order to assure them of a wider and easier propagation, then it is absolutely necessary for Him to furnish some stamp marking His plan. But what other stamp could be used for this purpose except some "deed divine"? Revelation is not a necessary except some God's part it is a free act. Hence, it should be realized in some exterior manifestation which is likewise free. It should take shape in some event which is simultaneously contingent and divine. Now what is this event if not a miracle? It may be an external miracle or an internal and psychological one. It may be a social-moral miracle or it may be physical; but at any rate, the sign must be something else than a "natural development" of the forces of the spirit, or of matter, or of society. People must recognize in it an unquestionable intervention from above, something that lies beyond nature. Here is the

<sup>30</sup> Cf. the articles "Dieu" and "Providence" in the *D.A.F.C.*, I, 941-1088; IV, 433-474, respectively.

only suitable means for authenticating a revelation. And Divine Wisdom cannot avoid using this means if we suppose that it wishes to authenticate a revelation.

**Fifth Objection:** *The conclusion that miracles are positively possible cannot be deduced from God's omnipotence.*

Proposed by Le Roy.

Like Stuart Mill, Le Roy also attacks the argument of God's omnipotence and the comparisons which are used to illustrate it — such as the power of a worker over his machine or of a king over his realm, and so on; but Le Roy approaches the problem from another viewpoint. "God can do anything," says Le Roy, "except the absurd," or the contradictory. But perhaps miracles are contradictory. Perhaps unknown to us there exists in the immense unfathomable depths of reality some hindrance that prevents a miracle from taking place. We know nothing about it. And since we are incapable of grasping the whole of reality, we cannot know anything about it. Consequently, the argument drawn from God's omnipotence comes down to "a simple 'Who knows?';" and no one can give a positive answer to it.

Here we recognize the famous principle of immanence or universal interdependence: everything belongs to everything else, everything is within everything else, and nothing can be known with certitude if known separately. We have studied this principle elsewhere and shown its exaggerations and assumptions.<sup>31</sup> We have seen that a partial science can be exact. In particular, as far as possibilities are concerned, it is certain that we judge about them quite a while before they are realized and without having an exhaustive knowledge about the universe. For example, whether we look upon them as truths or as recipes, as Le Roy does, nevertheless, mathematical theorems and even physical laws are certainly verified in thousands of happenings and realities which we have never seen and many aspects of which would be completely new for us and possibly rather disconcerting.

But the argument of Le Roy, like that of Stuart Mill, is above all opposed to every speculative and transcendent use of reason. If the human mind is confined to experience and to the immediate interpretation of experience, if it is incapable of making any decision in the abstract while reasoning about ideas, then all metaphysics has been condemned, including the rational proof for the

<sup>31</sup> Cf. the references and resumé given above on p. 24.

existence of God. And it must be added that Le Roy allows this consequence. To estimate the value of such extreme positions, the argument must center — let us say it just once more — not about miracles, but about metaphysics or general criteriology.

So as not to get too far afield, we shall simply note that Le Roy paints the position of those holding miracles quite otherwise than they themselves do. For these latter, the possibility of special proofs. It is not a possibility about which all direct information is lacking and which can be deduced only in a confused way along with other possibilities from the general principle of God's omnipotence. They do not say that God can do all things and consequently should also be able to do this thing. Rather, they say quite precisely that it is impossible for God not to be able to do this definite thing. Contradiction not only does not appear in miracles, but it does appear in their impossibility. It is this point that we hope will become quite evident after we have put forth the positive arguments that are the basis for the possibility of miracles.<sup>32</sup>

Sixth Objection: *To guarantee a revelation by means of prodigies is a procedure that is unworthy of God because it is too simple, too crude, and too extrinsic both to the truth advanced and to the mind addressed.*

Proposed by Seailles, Blondel, and Le Roy.

There is an "artificial tone" (Blondel) about the reasoning that proceeds from a properly established miracle to the fact of a divine revelation. Being clear and easy, it involves none of the "learned complicated methods" (Blondel) which please men of thought. Simple souls can allow themselves to be taken in by such reasoning, but not "minds capable of reflection and persons who have any sense of the interior life." (Le Roy) If one takes the miracle by itself as a sufficient motive for belief, if one does not "add something to the demonstration" (Le Roy) — for example, by stuffing the facts with symbolism" (Le Roy) — facts remain without any relation to the truth they are supposed to certify. Le Roy says that to use "the argument from miracles in this way is to act like a mathematician who would tell his pupils, 'Look, here is the statement of the theorem. You are not intelligent enough to grasp the proof. But I am going to

<sup>32</sup> Cf. below in Section II, pp. 40-41.

prove to you that it is true by working right here before your eyes a set of wonderful feats which will show you how strong I am.'

a) The charge of excessive simplicity directed against the proof for the fact of revelation is strange, to say the least. If God wants to speak to everybody, He must speak in a simple way. If He is concerned with all mankind and not merely with "minds capable of reflexion," then His work must be popular so that simple souls can interpret it by means of non-complicated reasonings. If God wants to be understood by man, He must speak to him in an "anthropomorphic" language. And generally speaking, it can be said that Infinite Goodness owes it to itself to set within the reach of everyone those truths which lead to salvation. Even the most mysterious of truths — such as those about God's action in the world — do not have to be reserved for the exclusive use of persons who are distinguished and souls that are cultivated and profound. Humble folk — yes, even coarse folk — should be able to obtain some non-misleading ideas about these mysteries; for example, by means of those parables that are so much disdained.

b) The nature of the reasoning just criticized will become more evident when we again take it up for our own purposes. Let us only mention that there is no similarity between the showman's flourish imagined by Le Roy and the "argument from miracles." As a matter of fact, even if a miracle is not a symbol or a parable in action, it has to have certain moral characteristics. The argument supposes this. For in order to be attributable to God, the prodigy must harmonize with our moral sense both in its intrinsic marks and in the manner in which it takes place. The same thing holds true concerning the doctrine to which the prodigy testifies. This doctrine may surpass our highest aspirations, but it cannot contradict them. It may go beyond them, but it must go in the same direction.

Moreover, a divine miracle has locked up within itself a significance that is intrinsic and essential, a significance that is independent of any allegorical meanings which may be added to it. It is this inner significance which saves the reasoning criticized by Blondel and Le Roy. A miracle announces that God is intervening, that God is speaking, and that consequently, man ought to listen on his knees. A miracle, so to speak, wears the trappings of the Supreme Majesty and of the Sovereign Power. It is the voice of God and as such it takes on an awesome character. This religious meaning is inseparable from a miracle and connects it intrinsically not to the content but to the form

of the message to which the miracle attests.

In the caricature which Le Roy compares to the reasoning he is attacking, the proofs have no connection with the conclusion. A clown's act is not a proof in the science of mathematics. But in reasoning on a miracle, even if this reasoning is of the "most extrinsic" type, the terms are on the same plane. There is an essential connection between God's power and His truthfulness. In this instance, a person goes from God to God. He concludes from God shown clearly by a supernatural deed to God as author of some revelation.<sup>33</sup>

Seventh Objection: *Since a miracle itself is a doubtful event, it cannot guarantee a revelation with certainty.*  
Proposed by Jean-Jacques Rousseau.

Jean-Jacques Rousseau professes the most extreme individualism. According to him, everything emanates from the individual — the motives for belief as well as authority and social ties. He would like a revelation made directly to himself — a "tête-à-tête" with God, such as Moses had. He finds it repugnant to accept prodigies attested by others as an indication of the truth which he should believe. "How's this!" he cries, "We're always talking about human witnesses. . . . How many men between God and me!" The human witnesses stand in need of testimonials themselves and as a result here we are tied up in a "horrible dispute" before entering upon God's revelation itself.

These demands implicitly reject the value of human testimony. If nothing is certain for an individual except what he has been able to perceive and experiment with by himself, all historical certitude vanishes. However, if one views testimony as a canal through which truth can be carried — if, for example, one accepts testimony as Jean-Jacques does when

<sup>33</sup> If a person considered the argument from an external miracle as too coarse and wished to contrast it with another more refined demonstration based upon psychological and moral phenomena, he would have to remember that these latter phenomena do not prove except to the extent that they are distinguished from natural phenomena. (Cf. what we said on p. 33 regarding Stuart Mill, and also Appendix II of *Immanence*.) However, this remark does not at all touch the two authors whose objections we are refuting. Both of them understand "internal apologetic" in an entirely different and less intellectual sense. (Cf. *Immanence*, pp. 174 ff. and 188 ff.; also *Notion de vérité*, pp. 35 ff.)

treating of profane history — then that person can no longer logically refuse God the right to make use of it.

But, insists the author of *Emile*, God could well have avoided such a procedure and spoken directly to me. — Of course He could, but was He obliged to? Why forbid God to use a means quite suited in itself for His purpose and in step with the customs of human society where so many truths, especially moral and religious truths, are transmitted by testimony? We do not see why God would be bound to bypass this simple natural means and have to prefer the countless and ceaseless psychological miracles that individual revelations suppose. If the supernatural shocks and startles when it makes its appearance outside, it is strange that people should require that it be multiplied indefinitely within themselves.

But after all, revelations to the individual would be more certain and easier for everyone to grasp. Maybe so; but revelation known through testimony is sufficient, providing it too can be reached when good will is put forth, and providing it can produce certitude under certain conditions. If these conditions are fulfilled, revelation through witnesses is possible, and we have an explanation why God may choose it. Moreover, we have experience to show that the means, against which Jean-Jacques protests, is an efficacious means. It works. Whatever you may think about the reality of miracles and in particular about the miracles of Jesus Christ, there can be no argument that it is by means of witnesses reporting these miracles that Christian teaching has spread throughout the world. Mankind has believed, not at all because of the guarantee furnished by individual reason — which Rousseau would wish to make the universal criterion — but on the authority of prodigies which only a handful of men could have witnessed.

Eighth Objection: *A miracle would ruin the foundations of certitude and morality. Consequently, God could not work a miracle.*  
Proposed by Spinoza, Kant, Renan, and others.

This objection resumes, develops, and completes certain ideas which we have already met. Our psychological and moral life supposes as a prerequisite a certain fixed order in reality upon which we can rely. In order to think, we must have ideas that are rigorously determined and unchangeable. In order to act, we must believe that the data acquired in our previous

experiences do remain the same. But a miracle sets all these prerequisites tottering and throws them into confusion. We can no longer rely upon science if we believe that phenomena, instead of obeying stable laws, are ruled by arbitrary whim. If one's sense of responsibility is to be maintained, the conscious subject must be sure that he is master of his own human acts and that every hidden supernatural cause is excluded. Finally, belief in miracles, by permitting man to hope for everything from him the thought of aiding himself and the sense of the real conditions with which his action can be fruitful.

All these conclusions have one common mistake. They suppose that once miracles gain a foothold in this world, they will invade everything. Nothing is more false. We must state the fact yet once more. Miracles are conceived by the majority of those advocating them as extremely rare exceptions which are *practically negligible* as far as the conduct of life and the development of science go. Before a miracle can be admitted in some concrete case, this exception has to be surrounded by indications that make it probable *hic et nunc*. Moreover, the area in which it can occur is strictly marked out; namely, the realm of contingent happenings. Everything bearing the stamp of necessity remains outside this realm, including the evident truths of reason and conscience. Finally, even if we suppose that miracles are brought about by malicious supernatural agencies within the sphere where miracles can occur, nevertheless, like every event, miracles remain subject to the control of a wise and equitable God, who cannot allow just anything to happen.<sup>34</sup>

## SECTION II: THE VIEW OF THE WORLD WHICH IS CONSONANT WITH DIVINE WONDERS

### I. *The physical possibility and the efficient cause of miracles.*

1. The world has a cause distinct from itself — the creative, conserving, infinite power that directs all things — the absolute master of its work. In all finite activity, it is active. This means that not only all energy originally stemmed from this source and is here and now drawing upon it, but also that every starting-up of an activity depends upon this source. To

<sup>34</sup> Concerning all this, cf. above, pp. 11-12 and 17.

use a figure, this power does more than carve out within the field of possible being the precise structure and special architecture of created causes. It also keeps them in being and activity — *verum Deus tenax vigor* — and exerts influence within the depths of each one causing it to spring up into action.

2. The Supreme Cause is free. Nothing necessitates it. Its independence in relation to everything can only be absolute. And it is a *contradiction in terms* to suppose that this Cause was obliged to create or that it could not suspend or modify in whole or in part those existing beings and powers that proceed from it. Of course, God cannot at one and the same time produce effects that are mutually exclusive. He cannot simultaneously give opposite characteristics to one and the same subject. For example, He cannot confer the properties of a square upon a circle. But a miracle is not at all like this. It is one way of existing, acting, or receiving, that follows upon some other way. It is a change, a removal or an addition, that is introduced into the work by the will of the Creator.

Le Roy wonders whether such an idea is actually not a contradiction. Our reply to him is a very definite "no," since the *opposite of a miracle would be the contradiction*. We reject the impossibility of miracles for the same reason that makes us reject a square-circle. It really is impossible to make these two ideas co-exist: a free Cause from which everything proceeds essentially and perpetually plus some real being that cannot in any way be changed by this Cause. If the whole embraces elements that are distinct and mutually independent, then it is a contradiction to say that this whole rules out every modification in its parts. This is where the positive reason for the possibility of miracles comes to light. For our mind not only perceives no obstacle to this possibility, but even finds its contrary inconceivable.

3. If God works miracles, this operation lies no more beyond our grasp than do His other exterior activities. As St. Augustine repeats so often, there is just as much mystery in the production of an event which we call ordinary as there is in a miracle. Both the miracle and the ordinary event have their roots in the Infinite; and in order to understand either of them fully and profoundly, our gaze would have to penetrate into the great abyss. God's action in a prodigy is no more powerful and no more complicated than it is in the most insignificant happening. The growth of a grain of wheat is a marvel just as disconcerting to the mind that scrutinizes it as is the multiplication of a few leaves. The surge of God's omnipotence remains the

same whether it achieves its goal without using any medium or whether it canalizes itself, so to speak, in order to pass through secondary causes and set them moving. The manner in which God's action unleashes the created springs of activity and the secret of their cooperation with His divine activity and the no easier to fathom than the question of miracles.

Thus we do not believe in a God absent from the world and existing out beyond its exterior — a God who after having created the world would have left it to itself and only come on the scene again by way of exception when He would use a miracle to alter some detail. This ridiculous dream is absurdity itself, if looked upon from a metaphysical point of view. We hold that God is always dwelling within His work and that He is just as intimately present in the most ordinary events as He is in the most surprising prodigies.

This is the efficient cause to which we attribute miracles. It is this Cause which makes them physically possible. In such a view of the world, miracles no longer appear as unrelated events lacking any connections with the rest; nor do they seem improbable and inconceivable *a priori*. Miracles have their place in the ensemble and in the system. For an ensemble is not the same as the uniformity of a law or a formula. And a system does not necessarily mean universal determinism or monism or immanentism.

Let us now consider miracles from their created aspect, studying the divine action as seen in the event produced.

1. In itself and by reason of its *material element*, the so-called miraculous phenomenon takes its place among other phenomena. It can be perceived and observed like the other. It has its component parts and its surroundings. It is not a rent or a hole in the web of events. It has its place in time and space. It is defined from the historical and scientific point of view by its relations with the rest of the world. If positive science and history are unable to free themselves completely from all metaphysics, they should limit themselves to recording a miracle as just another phenomenon that appeared in its turn during the unfolding course, not of causes and effects, but of antecedents and consequences. Metaphysics alone is qualified to pierce down to the deeper regions where causes lie, or rather, to discover them amid the material data which have been presented to metaphysics by the other disciplines. Or the question has been brought to this level, the only thing left to do is to decide which is the best metaphysics. Once Consequently, as long as science has not absorbed any

datum that belongs to philosophy, there is no need for science to render any decision about real causes. Science surely does not have to affirm or deny the miraculous nature of a phenomenon. Science is only required to leave the phenomenon untouched in itself and in its surroundings, neither deforming it nor diminishing it. For example, it must set down as facts, if such be the case, that the phenomenon took place without any of the ordinary antecedents which are known and considered to be sufficient.

At this point Le Roy objects, "You cannot regard something as a *datum in the class of phenomena* when you start off by endowing it with characteristics opposed to those constituting the notion of *phenomenal datum*. . . . The reality of an event is the intersection of the relations which it supports, the convergence in a loom of the threads connected with the event as with their center. . . . The phenomenal datum should be conceived as a knot of relationships or as a stationary wave whose immobility comes from the interference of contrary motions." Hence, Le Roy concludes that miracles are "unthinkable," since, by supposition, they are phenomena that have no connection with any phenomenal condition.

But I ask Mr. Le Roy whether in thus expressing himself he means to speak the language of science or that of metaphysics? Is he considering the interference of conditions that exercise a real influence, in the ontological sense of that phrase? That is, is he speaking of the intersecting-point of causal influences; or is he simply viewing the convergence of different data and the fabric of interwoven phenomena? It seems that his thought swings from one meaning to the other. It comes and goes from phenomena to causes and from causes to phenomena. From the fact that every phenomenon should have its component parts and its surrounding circumstances in the *phenomenal order*, he concludes that an event which has no *efficient ontological cause* in this world cannot appear in this world as a phenomenon. The error in this reasoning is obvious. A choice has to be made. If a person keeps himself outside the plane of metaphysics, if he excludes the consideration of causes — understood in the strong scholastic sense of the word — then all that lies before him are successions of phenomena; and these, despite all their constancy, are not there-by rendered necessary. Necessity does not exist for the eyes of simple experience.

When a person says that a preceding phenomenon exercises

an influence upon those that follow, when he says that it furnishes these latter phenomena with elements that make them similar, or when he sets up between these and the prior phenomenon some connection of proportionality or of sufficient reason or of infallible succession, then he is no longer observing events but rather philosophizing about them. Thus, whether he admits it or not, the person is thinking about some unseen "power" exercised between the person and the world. Thus, whether he "power" exercised between the person and the world. Thus, whether he ascends about some communication of the distinct phenomena. He is thinking about some communication of forces or elements. But if he will be in order. He may take his stand, for example, upon the deterministic postulate which explains everything by rigid laws and infallible connections. But then he should no longer speak simply of a "phenomenal datum."

Consequently, to avoid all this confusion, we will say that if miracles exist, they are phenomena that appear in the sensible world surrounded by other phenomena and closely connected to them. Nevertheless, the causes behind miracles and the other phenomena, while equally invisible, are not identical.

2. If we continue to view miracles in themselves, but now focus on their *formal element* — that is, on miracles considered as interventions by some free agent in the midst of sensible phenomena — then miracles present the same problem that our own created freedom does or that is found in the reactions of mind upon matter.

One brand of materialistic determinism does not hesitate to give the same treatment to miracles and to free will. "From the deterministic principle," says Mr. Goblott, "these two corollaries follow immediately: (1) miracles do not exist; (2) free will does not exist." Basically, this is very logical. In either case there really is a question of some energy of the spiritual order that does not fall under sense experience, is neither weighed nor measured, and does not have to operate, but nonetheless it does modify the interplay of materialistic determinism. Let us not be so naive as to consider God's freedom as on an exact parallel with our own. Let us not forget that we experience our own freedom and only conclude to God's. After all, what remains true is that an inescapable experience sets right before our eyes something that the opponents of miracles are so reluctant to admit; namely, *that there are material changes without a cause in the same order*, and that there are sensible phenomena which are not sufficiently explained by any necessary antecedent.

The physical possibility of miracles seems to result from

the cumulative effect of the ideas we have just indicated. We possess a view of the world into which miracles fit without inconsistency. The man who accepts this view will be able to admit the reality of an extraordinary intervention from God without interior strain or violence and without completely upsetting the principles and grounds of his intellectual life, if some day such an intervention does impose itself upon him.

## II. *The moral possibility and the final cause of miracles.*

The viewpoint which we have just sketched is, nevertheless, still too limited and superficial. It must fit into another deeper and broader view, the kind of view which has never been so well depicted as in several pages from Newman. We shall give the gist of those pages here, quoting him directly at times.<sup>35</sup>

1. **THE EXISTENCE OF THE MORAL ORDER.** Anyone who admits a wise and good God sees that the physical order in the world can only be a portion of a far vaster system. The physical order must be enclosed within the framework of the moral system and be absolutely subordinated to it. For God is not only "the Great Architect," the fashioner of the world, but most important of all, He is Supreme Goodness and Truth, Infinite Love, Justice, and Wisdom. And His highest purposes can only be those of truth, justice, and love.

From the idea of God alone we can deduce in regard to man that God's intentions for him are that man should direct himself towards truth and virtue and that this physical world — in so far as it is related to man — has no other purpose than to help him in doing this.

However, to those who may find this metaphysical reasoning unintelligible, the facts will undoubtedly speak a clearer language. You will recall that it was over this realm of facts that Hume wished to guide us.<sup>36</sup> He said it is impossible for us to know what God wants to do or what He will do unless we examine what He actually is doing.

Very well then, let us admit that much for a while. However, the precise point is this: what God is doing does not lie entirely within the physical order alone. The divine masterpiece contains moral elements which are also revealed to us by experience and which none of us can ignore. Here below, we discover certain moral realities. For example, certain laws about good and

<sup>35</sup> Newman, *Essays on Miracles*, Essay I, pp. 16-22.

<sup>36</sup> Cf. above, pp. 31 ff.

evil are evident to our conscience; and there is a spiritual growth in man quite different from his physical growth. The sense of responsibility, the instinctive approval of good, and the spontaneous rejection of evil — all these profound moral traits within our nature come just as much from God as does the structure of our organs. In like manner, the direction of our mind towards truth, its innate desire to know — and especially, to know causes and ultimate purposes — the need of getting to the bottom of the problem about our spiritual destiny and of knowing what lies beyond the veil of death — all these things are a type of impulse from God who is pushing us in a certain direction. Besides this, a judgment which we have to make declares that spiritual values are the principal ones and that in God's plan all the physical order is subordinated to these values.

2. THE MORAL ORDER AND REVELATION. Now these aspirations and tendencies in our nature stretch out in vague appeals for some divine aid to help us satisfy them. Almost everyone feels the need of positive religious observances to fill out and concretize our moral obligations, or rather, to absorb them completely in the very act of transforming them. For the most part, men do not think they could be moral without relation to God. Just as soon as conscience gets beyond the primary notions of good and evil, it begins to hesitate. It is troubled to find sharp opposition existing between its own decisions and those of other consciences. For all its independence, conscience appreciates at times the benefit of being guided from the outside by some precise infallible law, by some authority which would also serve as a guiding light. The soul longs to possess the necessary truths in a way that is firm and stable. It wants them removed from dispute and made accessible to all. Among men this longing gives birth to the aspiration for "some heavenly guide," and "that inextinguishable desire for a divine message which has led men in all ages to acquiesce even to pretended revelations rather than forego the consolation thus afforded them."<sup>37</sup> We should reread the *Phaedo* and the melancholy words of Simmias on the difficulty of attaining certainty in the problem of our destiny: "I would have him take the best and most irrefragable of human theories (ἀνεφελπισίαν) and let this be the raft upon which he sails through life — not without risk, as I admit, if he cannot find some word of God (λόγου θείου) which will more surely and safely carry him."<sup>38</sup>

<sup>37</sup> Newman, *loc. cit.*, p. 19.

<sup>38</sup> Plato, *Phaedo*, c. 25.

Here we have the type of aspirations that are found widespread among mankind, the sort of prolongations of the moral order that draw it quite close to God.

Of course, these aspirations are indefinite, fluctuating things that would be deformed were they concretized into strict exigencies that had as their object the supernatural in the strict sense. But the very indefiniteness of these divinely fashioned beginnings makes them apt to be successfully completed and crowned in various ways. And therefore, a revelation which could come to the aid of such tendencies, which would give direction to them and lead them to their end, which would be a divine remedy for the feeble groping of moral conscience and for the weaknesses of the human intellect in seeking out the necessary truths — such a revelation does not appear as something unlikely and improbable in advance. And if someone, in the name of the methods of positive science, should refuse to take notice of these indications, then he would have to be informed that his mind has been running down grooves too narrow to catch those realities in human nature which are the most delicate, most vital, and most profound.

### 3. THE PLACE OF MIRACLES IN THE MORAL ORDER, AS A MEANS OF REVELATION

Thus the physical world is penetrated and surrounded by the moral world. These two form just one totality. And if a miracle took place, it would be only a modification of the less important part for the advantage of the more important and dominant part. Neither would this modification imply any intrinsic inconsistency, any lack of harmony in the whole system. Rather, it would imply the subordination of the system's component parts. We see the same thing happening in a machine, in which certain springs set other parts into motion, counter-balance them, or, if need be, stop them so as to contribute to the smooth running of the whole in accord with the desired goal.

Now if we have been able to point out the place in the divine work where a revelation could possibly and fittingly occur, we have by that very fact been pointing out the place for a miracle. A miracle is the means and the necessary condition for revelation. We explained this in connection with the objections of Stuart Mill, Blondel, and Le Roy.<sup>39</sup> Revelation is a teaching

<sup>39</sup> Cf. above, pp. 33-35 and the note on p. 38.

which is presented as founded upon the authority of God. And this is its distinctive and special title for being believed, its formal and decisive reason for the adherence it demands. Consequently, the least that could be asked before believing in the revelation, is that this authority should show itself, should attest its own intervention here and now. The sign of this intervention can only be some fact. And it must be some contingent fact since revelation to begin with is itself a contingent fact. Revelation does not come forth as a *deduced* doctrine, as by reason.

On the other hand, the natural longings and the vague anticipations that we mentioned prove nothing except the fitness and probability of a revelation. They do not at all certify its existence. These desires incline a person to regard revelation from a certain viewpoint. They keep him from holding that the discovery of revelation is improbable; and they perhaps even incline him to hope for it.<sup>40</sup> But they do not at all constitute the revelation. Far less would these desires by themselves be able to determine the quality and the content of the revelation. Some people seem to forget this. For they would want the divine message to be connected with these desires as to its own special guarantee. Apt internal dispositions do prepare a place within us for the supernatural truth. They put our soul in harmony with this truth beforehand. They make it possible that once the heavenly food has come down within us, it can be assimilated there. They are the dispositions which a revelation should bring to fulfillment. But they cannot be its special guarantee, the characteristic and distinctive sign of a revelation.

The reason for this is that a religion with an earthly origin — for example, some old institution which had been fashioned through the years upon the needs of man — could also show a striking agreement with human nature and supply the individual with some moral support. A sage traditional teaching, elaborated by men of old and developed along poetical as well as reasonable lines, would give a good deal of satisfaction to a man's conscience and mind. And from the viewpoint of agreeableness, the traditional teaching would even have an advantage over any supposedly revealed doctrine, for it would not contain any mystery nor any surprising facts.

<sup>40</sup> At least to hope for it in some general way — as a support about which one knows not whether it will be supernatural or just providential.

Now all these things are a far cry from being a proof of supernatural origin. Obviously, a divine revelation could not contradict any justifiable element in our aspirations. But this is a purely negative norm; and once a divine revelation has been recorded, people always expect some positive proof.

Moreover, if one bears in mind all the unexpected things which God's infinite knowledge and love could wish us to find in the vast rivers of truth and grace that He could channel down to us, one realizes that a revelation can be something else than the fulfillment of our inner needs, that it does not have to be measured and, so to speak, designed ahead of time in accord with those desires. It can be just as disconcerting for them as it is enriching. Sometimes mystery attracts, but it also shocks and repels.

In any case, therefore, the mystery could not be its own proof. Some sure sign capable of easy interpretation<sup>41</sup> must accompany it to show to the simplest as well as to the most learned that it is God who is presenting the message and that it is absolutely necessary to assent to it. And so once more we find ourselves wondering what sign could fill this role if we exclude miracles in the strict sense — that is, an exterior, physical miracle or one of its equivalents.<sup>42</sup>

<sup>41</sup> Despite all the theoretical discussions about miracles, it is certain that on the practical plane and with the ordinary individual this sign leads quickly and persuasively to a conclusion. Cf. above, p. 39.

<sup>42</sup> Cf. above, p. 34. I am speaking of exact equivalents. It is impossible to conclude rigorously to a divine revelation in the strict sense when one starts from a near miracle or from a miracle taken in a wider sense or from some providential happening.

However, there are some people who set up the fact of the Church as a motive of credibility opposed to the argument from miracles. Let us avoid any confusion of ideas on this point.

The Church can be considered under two aspects. First, as being in itself "a work of God"; that is, a reality which natural and human forces are insufficient to explain and which requires some divine extraordinary intervention — in short, a genuine social miracle. Understood in this sense, the Church is within its own sphere. She exerts the same type as a physical miracle is in its sphere. She exhibits the same title and it is stamped with the same seal.

The Church can also be considered from a completely natural viewpoint, prescinding from her causes and from her ultimate explanation. In this case, she would appear as the most venerable and most beneficent institution of mankind, as an unparalleled teacher of morals, etc., and consequently as eminently worthy of belief. In this case, she is only a witness to the supernatural, and not the supernatural itself. If then a person puts his faith in what she tells him,



Hence, before all positive verification of a miracle, one is led to admit its probability. There appears some sublime religious goal, or, according to Newman's expression, "some lofty moral object," which is a sufficient motive to justify an interruption of the physical order. And this motive fits in harmoniously with what natural experience teaches us about God's intentions for the spiritual betterment of mankind. It squares with what reason teaches us about the ultimate goal for which our souls were sown within this visible universe.

*Conclusion.* If then we conclude to a real miracle some day, it will not be simply because we find a miracle some any physical explanations. We will make no appeal to God's causality in a desperate effort to find some cause. For us God will not be the unknown X that is supposed to exist behind events whose reason escapes us. He will not be just a name that is given to an unsolved difficulty. The supernatural will not be a storehouse from which we can drag out some unprovable but convenient explanations for the embarrassing about which we know nothing and can therefore suppose any-thing. Such a recourse to the supernatural would be unreasonable. That type of flight into the shadows or that kind of "leap into the dark" would for once justify the jeering of the unbelievers and the charges of intellectual feebleness and eccentricity.

Neither will we view the miraculous as that ever unsolved residue which science leaves behind, as that *terra incognita* whose boundaries diminish in the measure that investigations are carried on, or as that little isle which we can predict will disappear some day since its banks are being gnawed away completely by the mounting flood of discoveries. No, these completely negative characteristics are not at all those of a miracle, as we see it. We have been led to admit that miracles are possible and likely because of positive reasons from philosophy. And these reasons will remain the same no matter how much progress science makes in the future. It will be eternally true he believes upon her testimony first in an extraordinary divine intervention, and then because of this divine intervention, he believes in the divine character of the doctrine proposed.

Briefly then, in order to accept a doctrine as revealed, it is first of all necessary to accept *the fact of a revelation*. Now this fact always implies some sort of miracle. To say "God revealed," comes down to saying, "God showed by supernatural signs that a certain doctrine was His own."

that there is a God and that this God can intervene in His work, that reasons exist which can justify such an intervention, and finally, that the whole event fits in with the indications of moral design which we notice in this world. Miracles are not presented to us

as unconnected and unmeaning occurrences, but as holding a place in an extensive plan of Divine government, as completing the moral system (known already from other sources) connecting Man and his Maker, and introducing him to the means of securing his happiness in another and eternal state of being.<sup>43</sup>

### III. *How are the principles just established applied to concrete cases?*

#### 1. THE CONDITIONS REQUIRED BEFORE ATTRIBUTING A PRODIGY TO GOD

In accord with the foregoing remarks, it will not be any sort of extraordinary phenomenon which will make us think of the supernatural. And all those statements that are sometimes made about the "marvellous" nature of scientific discoveries or about their similarities with miracles do not pertain to the present question at all. There is not the least likelihood that the exceptional properties of radium are due to some special intervention from God. And even folks with just a bit of instruction would be reasoning poorly if they took the phonograph or the telephone for miracles. As a matter of fact, these phenomena are, first of all, constant, repeating themselves in the same way. Thus, without knowing how to explain them, a person can find out the definite conditions on which they take place or even the means of producing them. In treating of things like these, a person is encountering a law, unknown perhaps, but regular. Moreover, none of the circumstances surrounding this sort of phenomena would make a person suspect some religious or moral end for which God might have produced them.<sup>44</sup>

Therefore, the only extraordinary phenomena that might put in a bid for the title of miracle are, to begin with, exceptional phenomena — happenings which bear the stamp of

<sup>43</sup> Newman, *op. cit.*, p. 22. Parenthesis added by Fr. de Tonquédec.

<sup>44</sup> Cf. above, pp. 3 and 17.

freedom and which seem at least to originate in the intentions of some will which is master of its goals and its moments. Moreover, only those phenomena which furnish some indication that God is using them as interpreters will be able to square with the plan for governing the universe. These phenomena should not only contain nothing that contradicts right reason or shocks a well-developed moral sense, but in addition they should in no way be non-committal, silent phenomena which have nothing to say through their manner of occurrence to a soul preoccupied with religious problems. Some commentary is required so that people can grasp the meaning of the phenomena. This commentary may be explicit, furnished by the preaching of the wonder-worker or by the prayers of the believers; or it may be implicit, contained in the action, in the surrounding circumstances, or in the spiritual atmosphere enveloping the events.

"Besides the strangeness of miracles, or in the spiritual 'there is one single characteristic which gives them a distinctive mark. It is that either before or during or after the event, they are connected with religious phenomena. Of course, these phenomena are not always the same. Sometimes it is a prayer, sometimes a command in God's name, or even a simple act of trust in a supernatural power. But all of these religious phenomena have one common mark, and this is striking enough to be noted by an impartial scholar. In this situation you have indications of a causality that can perhaps be easily discovered."

The above remarks make it clear that a divine miracle is not a mere prodigy, *τέρας*, but a sign, *σημεῖον*. Matthew Arnold charges no interest for the absurdities he loans to his adversaries when he gives the following summary of their view:

In the judgment of the mass of mankind, could I visibly and undeniably change the pen with which I write this into a pen-wiper, not only would this which I write this require a claim to be held perfectly true and convincing, but I should even be entitled to affirm, and to be believed in affirming, propositions the most palpably at war with common fact and experience.<sup>45</sup>

Here is a complete distortion of the idea of a divine mir-

<sup>45</sup> Matthew Arnold, *Literature and Dogma*, A. L. Burt Co., New York, p. 143.

acle and the confusing of it with magic or simple sleight-of-hand.

Let us say some trickster does perform his type of feat for us, or that a sorcerer — if such there be — does stupify or terrify his audience. Still, this gives neither the one nor the other so much as the appearance of being ambassadors of infallible truth. What has yet to be seen are the means used in accomplishing the prodigy. Were devices employed that were proportioned to the result obtained, or are there no natural means that can be assigned to explain it? If the latter case is true, the question has not yet been settled. For then the characteristics of the event, its milieu and surroundings, and even the message which the prodigy accompanies and is supposed to authorize<sup>46</sup> must be studied as the basis for deciding whether the prodigy could possibly be viewed as some work of God. As long as this last question remains unsolved, the phenomenon itself remains at least equivocal, enigmatic, and suspect. It is a hieroglyph which is studied by intrigued onlookers without their being able to decipher its queer figure. It is a letter that comes from who-knows-where and bears the traces of an unknown hand.

## 2. THE ATTRIBUTION ITSELF: PROCEDURES AND VALIDITY

Now let us suppose there is a man who is furnished with all the philosophical certainties and all the empirical indications which we mentioned. In his travels this man encounters a marvellous event and attributes it to an extraordinary intervention by God. What logical and psychological procedures did he employ? And how valid are they?

A) The hypothesis is as follows. The facts to be interpreted are real events, clearly recorded and beyond question, which

<sup>46</sup> Elsewhere we have stated how this latter idea could enter into a reasoning process without a vicious circle. "The direct basis for deciding about a prodigy should in no way be the doctrine to which the prodigy testifies or gives expression. Rather it should be *some other independent doctrine* from which a person can judge this doctrine and consequently the prodigy itself. . . . To evaluate the fact and the doctrine attested, I employ principles that come from a different source. Before considering either the fact or the doctrine, I already possess a formed conscience, certain ideas about honesty and decency, as well as certain philosophical or religious convictions." — *Immanence*, p. 225.

science leaves unexplained. The occurrence of these events favors a certain doctrine claiming to be a revelation, since the events either announce this revelation or confirm it. These take place at the sanctuaries of some definite religion, following upon some invocation of the God or the saints of this religion, or upon a command from its founder or its apostles. Moreover, the way in which these prodigies take place, the ideas to which they testify, and the accompanying circumstances are not only morally irreproachable, but they actually tend to lift souls towards God, to ennoble them, and to urge them on towards goodness. If some mystery is proposed, there is nothing puerile about it nor anything resembling those ill-founded sterile absurdities which are thought up at random to amuse or shock the mind of man. From the mystery's shadows luminous traits appear. The mind does not know whether these are genuine or not, but at least it perceives that there is no evident deformity in them. Finally, this doctrine's power for good is confirmed by its influence upon human society.

Does the conclusion now follow necessarily that the prodigies worked in favor of this doctrine are divine? and that therefore this is a pure revelation from God, and not some human teaching with particles of gold buried in the ore? Would it not be better for a person to suspend judgment, to admit that he is face to face with the inexplicable and confronted with coincidences which, while quite exceptional, may possibly have been brought about by chance through the interplay of unknown natural causes? We do not know the whole of nature, its powers and its hidden resources. Maybe the unknown is involved here. Who can tell? Perhaps the future with its scientific discoveries will uncover this point. Consequently, how can you rule it out legitimately? This brings us to the most delicate and most difficult point in the interpretation of the facts.

Why prefer God to the unknown? Because all the *positive* evidence is for God, while there is no evidence at all in favor of the unknown. I possess a perfectly satisfactory explanation, which also gives an exact answer to the whole question proposed, I know a cause capable of producing the result. I know that it is present. I see it all around the marvellous event proposed, material things towards certain intelligent and moral purposes similar to the purposes I am aware of here. Moreover, all the indications I have gathered make the activity of this cause quite likely in this event. Then why should I turn away from this cause and go running off to the unknown? For, according to the hypothesis itself, this unknown is a pure X about which I know

nothing — neither its existence, its presence, nor its activity. Besides, I know that this unknown factor leaves no clues of its own activity, for if it did, it would no longer be the unknown. Thus it is a simple possibility, an undetermined abstraction stripped of any positive probability; and I conjure it up precisely to avoid concluding to God.

This brand of thinking would not be employed in any other field. Anytime a man knows just one isolated thing as the likely cause for an event, he concludes that it was this cause which acted and definitely not some unknown X. When an expert has found the conditions for a phenomenon, then, once he knows that these conditions are present and that he can suppose them free to operate, he will pronounce without any hesitation that these conditions are operating, and he will attribute the result to them. And it never even occurs to him that some unknown cause has slipped into the place of these conditions to imitate their way of acting.

Now let us not deceive ourselves here. Concluding to a cause because it is the only likely one is not a unique occurrence in our thinking — a procedure that works just in apologetics. People reason like this everywhere. On more than one occasion we have called attention to the fact that there are no circumstances wherein a person sees the cause producing the effect. A cause's influence is not an object of experience nor an object of positive science. From the connection between two facts a person concludes to their causal relationship.

But how are we going to answer a person who would say, "The first fact is merely an antecedent without any efficiency, and what produces the effect is some hidden cause"? No reply could be given that would be immediately evident as far as experience and reasoning go. This is why occasionalism<sup>47</sup> is so difficult to refute. It is not refuted on the basis of facts. It denies no evidence obtained through observation. It is refuted only by an appeal to the principle of sufficient reason — an appeal of exactly the same type as is used in the case of miracles.

For example, you will say that the red-hot coal brought close to a piece of wood is the cause of its burning. Why? Because in the coal we have a cause that is proportioned to the effect, capable of producing it, and possessing in itself something similar to what will appear in the result. There is no

<sup>47</sup> This doctrine of Malebranche denies all real efficiency in secondary causes.

reason for seeking further. Even though it is theoretically possible, once the principle of sufficient reason has been set aside, it should not be thought that some "malicious demon" — to use Descartes' phrase — has substituted its own activity for that of the fire, and produced the burning in its place.

The same thing holds true when dealing with a miracle. The only likely cause is God. Even though it is theoretically possible, once the principle of sufficient reason has been set aside, it should not be thought that some hidden cause is at work where God seems to be acting and where He has every reason to act. Thus we see the reason why this seemingly sound objection, which is sometimes formulated against recourse to God's causality, turns out to be false. For it is said that the activity of any kind of natural cause is more likely than God's miraculous activity. We reply to the contrary. There are some cases where God's activity, because of all the considerations we have adduced, is more likely than any other kind of cause, and in fact, the only likely than any other.

The opponents can twist this difficulty of unknown causes in whatever way they wish, but they will not find in it anything to urge against miracles beyond a pure negative possibility. Past events upon which they try to base their case or predictions of the future towards which they direct the difficulty do not help a bit and do not change the nature of the difficulty at all. To bring this topic to a close, a brief summary is in order.

Some events, formerly held as miraculous, have been explained scientifically. Therefore, the conclusion is drawn that everything which today lacks a natural explanation may receive one tomorrow. One condition is required if our views about God's plan and the antecedent likelihood of miracles are not to remain just pure theory without any concrete application. That condition is the existence of some facts which have no natural explanations. Now this condition varies as science develops. The indefinite perfectibility of science brings up before our eyes the vision of the gradual disappearance of miracles. Consequently, since the foundation supporting our conclusion comes smaller and smaller and threatens to disappear, our conclusion itself begins to totter.

We have already encountered these ideas; and while holding our final response — which could not precede an examination of the facts — we have pointed out that the indefinite perfectibility of science is a simple postulate which has no

positive support at all.<sup>48</sup> We have no assurance that some day science should have an explanation for everything. Moreover, in the argument for such a view, we noted a passage that went quite beyond bounds. We realize that an unknown cause may produce something that looks like a miracle, and that people can make mistakes and have made mistakes in this matter.

However, it does not follow from this that a person has the right to suspect the presence of error everywhere. We will soon see with what degree of strictness this presence of error can be excluded.<sup>49</sup>

Be this as it may, if a person reasoned in other matters as our adversaries do in the question of miracles, no certainty would remain intact. Just because certain calculations have proved false, must no calculations be accepted, except provisionally? Just because certain explanations in science have turned out to be inaccurate, has one the right to mistrust the whole of science? Is it positively probable that everything in science is false because of corrections in some of its parts?

For example, is it positively probable that scientists will some day discover that water is not composed of hydrogen and oxygen, but that it comes from some third element which has remained in the dark until now? Of course, this matter of miracles — with its religious, psychological, historical, and metaphysical aspects — is infinitely more delicate to handle than such evident commonplaces of science. But these latter are useful precisely because they render strikingly clear the illogicality of a procedure which would otherwise pass unnoticed. Consequently, let us put aside these general suspicions which only confuse the issue. The only thing we are concerned with here are some questions about appearances.

It happens in the problem of miracles, as in all other problems, that a person confuses an apparent cause for the real one. It also happens sometimes, as in other problems, that a more profound examination will allow a person to make a choice between two causes, both of which seemed likely at first sight.

<sup>48</sup> Cf. above, pp. 16 and 18. On these pages we saw that the cases were comparatively rare in which natural explanations were given to supposed miracles. If a person prescinds from nervous diseases, which simulate organic diseases and are cured instantly by suggestion, these cases are reduced practically to nil. It is historical criticism rather than the natural explanations which have reduced the mass of wonders.

<sup>49</sup> Cf. below, p. 58. There are some cases where error is metaphysically impossible.

Lastly, as in all other problems, the question may sometimes remain undecided. Up until this point you have seen good solid ground upon which you can get your footing and push forward. But to go on and say, "Since a man makes mistakes sometimes, maybe he is making them all the time," is to dig up the old "Who knows?" query of universal scepticism and to apply it to some particular subject. It is broadcasting an airy assertion and conjuring up a possibility that has no positive foundation.

B) What are the characteristics and the quality of the certitude whose acquisition we have just described?

a. *The minimum of certitude.* In general, certitude implies at least the following points. The bare, negative, theoretical possibility of unknown causes does not constitute a sufficient reason for doubting. Doubt is still possible, but it would not have any reasonable foundation. Prudence permits and even advises assent. For the unknown is improbable, not only because it lacks any foundation but also because there are positive reasons for excluding it.

In the non-controversial subjects, which we compared with that of miracles, no one but a wit of exceptional originality will prefer a mere possibility to some positive likelihood. Yet in those subjects, too, the event would be feasible. But it would be a clear-cut freak, an eccentricity without any interest or profit. Not so in the question of miracles; for this problem or so much significance in itself and in its consequences, and it controls the management of our moral life so immediately that we can understand why the mind might shy away from some positive conclusion in this matter. It is clear that the certitude with which we are dealing here is not the certitude obtained a mathematical demonstration. There the truth imposes itself without strict necessity; it hems in the mind at every turn a certitude wherein practical wisdom, an upright will, and prudence have their role to play.

b. *The maximum of certitude.* Frequently, however, in as-  
senting to a miracle, there will be far more certitude than we have described. Certain cases will arise where the mere possibility of some unknown natural cause will not even exist. In vain has emphasis been laid upon the hidden resources of the physical and psychological worlds and upon our ignorance of the regard to them. For there are limits here which a sound mind will obstinately refuse to transgress. We do not know the positive limits of natural forces, but we do know some of their negative limits. We do not know exactly in what direction these

forces are moving; but we think we can say that they definitely are not going in this or that direction. In combining oxygen and hydrogen, you will *never* get chlorine. In sowing wheat, you will *never* get roses. And similarly, one human word will *never* be sufficient by itself to calm storms or to bring the dead back to life.<sup>50</sup>

Over against these facts, there is no possibility — not even a negative one — which stands up. There is no "maybe" that can survive on such a nebulous supposition. If someone, while sowing wheat, thinks that *maybe* rosebushes will sprout up from these grains; if, while combining oxygen and hydrogen, he thinks that *maybe* he will get chlorine; or if he thinks that *maybe* his word will have power over storms and the dead, then this man is abnormal. Experiences that are infinite in number and variety, experiences that have occurred in every imaginable circumstance since the world began assure us that these results are completely impossible for nature left to itself. If nature possessed the power to produce them, surely at some time or other amid that infinite variety of circumstances, it would have produced them.

And yet, it is especially in certain circumstances, quite clearly brought about by a Will which has control of all things, that impossibilities like these will make their appearance. "On opening the mouth of a fish caught in a lake, there is a possibility of my finding a didrachma there. But after Peter had been asked whether his Master, too, would not pay the temple tax, the fact that Jesus should say to him:

I do not have to pay. However, we must give these men no offense. Go down to the sea, throw in a hook, and land the first fish to come up. Then open its mouth, and you will find a stater. Take that, and give it to them to pay for me and you;<sup>51</sup>

plus the fact that all this occurs just the way He said it would, makes one ask how anyone can refuse to see a miracle here. The fact may be denied, but once the circumstances have occurred in this way, no one will deny the transcendent character of the fact."<sup>52</sup> The accumulation of such coincidences eventually forms such a heavy weight of evidence that it becomes almost impossible to resist, *providing the facts are real.*

<sup>50</sup> The objection comes to mind which Loisy brought up against Le Roy: "The mind's power over matter certainly does not go so far as to reanimate cadavers."

<sup>51</sup> Mt. 17:27. The English translation of J. A. Kleist, S. J., has been used.

<sup>52</sup> J.-V. Bainvel, *Nature et Surnaturel*, p. 299.

"Here is a man who professes himself an ambassador sent from God, and he works miracles to prove his ambassadorship... This man is surrounded by enemies who hedge him in whenever he makes a move. Their whole intent is directed at exposing him as an impostor, at ripping away the mask from his false miracles; and we see them trying their best to achieve their goal. And yet, not once do they catch him pretending. They themselves are the first to recognize that he wrought a cure, that he brought someone back to life, and that he worked all kinds of miracles...."

"And this man does not perform just one prodigy of a certain particular type in just such and such a circumstance. No, he works hundreds of them — every species and manner of miracle. He tells the sea to become calm, and it becomes calm. He tells the dead to rise, and they rise. He multiplies loaves of bread, and he changes water into wine. He curses a tree, and it dries up. He says, 'It is I,' and the soldiers drawing near to capture him fall backwards. He says, 'Cast your nets on this side,' and suddenly the nets are filled after a thousand useless tries during the whole night. He cures every kind of disease with a word or a simple touch, both those near at hand and far away, sometimes demanding faith and sometimes working the miracle without the patient's suspecting anything, and so on and on...."

"I do not know all that we can expect from nature, and so on sure that nature is not under the control of men in this way. Before this multitude of facts and this variety of circumstances, the fact becomes obvious."<sup>53</sup> Finally, if all these marvels are put to the service of a moral revolution which is the profoundest and most beneficial that humanity has undergone, then the divine intervention appears so evident that no avenue of escape is left open.

And yet, despite all this, I believe that a mind which has firmly taken sides against the supernatural could still hold fast against these proofs. Perhaps it would not state frankly that it had a good enough explanation in unknown natural causes, but at least it would refuse to form any sort of conclusion. I mentioned the condition, *providing the facts are real*. In the cases we are speaking about, it is actually in regard to their reality that doubt will arise more easily. People will most frequently

<sup>53</sup> Bainvel, *Nature et Supernaturel*, pp. 299-300.

escape from miracles by falling back upon critical difficulties, such as the authenticity and the interpretation of documents.<sup>54</sup>

c. *Certitude in this matter is a moral certitude*. The role played by the will. The certitude we are speaking about can consequently be called *moral*, in the sense that Ollé-Laprune has given the word. This means it is a certitude which has to do with religious and moral questions, where doubt is always possible, where the will's dispositions can suggest doubt as an escape. In many cases, if not in all, this certitude may be free; but this does not mean that it is an arbitrary or ill-founded certitude. Actually, this certitude does not consist in twisting a person's mind so that it is turned violently towards some preferred hypothesis. It does not make a person view the unreal as real because of some subjective decree. Rather, this certitude results from a loyal, straightforward will — a will that does not fear the light, that freely and meritoriously assumes the attitude it should assume to view the problem correctly. It is not a matter of seeing what one wants to see, but of freely taking the position where he will see what does exist. By itself, the possibility of an unknown natural cause is too vacuous and insignificant to make the mind hesitate about it. But external influences, prejudices, or advantages can enlarge and exaggerate this possibility. To cause the mind to embrace this hypothesis (of the unknown cause), there must be present an indomitable repugnance or a fixed idea against the supernatural. If this is present, it will suffice; if absent, it will not.

This influence of moral dispositions is especially noticeable in those minds which I shall call critical, without attaching any favorable or unfavorable connotation to the word. I am speaking of those people whom any motive at all in the intellectual or affective order will arouse to a more than ordinary investigation of the reasons for doubting. The other people — who are assuredly the greater portion of those admitting the antecedent certitudes that we mentioned — will not even think about doubting. The abstract possibility of unknown causes will not even present itself to them, and it is perfectly natural that they instinctively adopt the only hypothesis which is supported by sufficient reasons, the only positive and satisfactory cause that they know. However, this does not imply that the will plays no part in this case. The will may possess

<sup>54</sup> These questions will be examined in the Second Part of this article. Cf. pp. 67 ff.

deep habits, certain attitudes meritoriously acquired, and a freedom from passions which account for these movements in it that seem to rise entirely by instinct.

The foregoing remarks should not convey the impression that the certitude about miracles is a poorly founded certitude. Indeed, this would be making as serious a mistake as to confuse a person's dispositions with the motives for his judgments. It should not be thought that for every certitude wherein the will plays its part there must be some corresponding unstable or uncertain object. It is well known that in philosophy, for example, as well as in history, the most solidly established theses are not insured against attacks which spring up very often from the varying tendencies of people's feelings. And it is superfluous to insist on the following well-known fact: that the clear perception of certain truths, even necessary truths — such as God's existence or the soul's immortality — requires some moral preparation, at least under ordinary conditions. The Catholic Church also teaches that the certitude of the Faith is a free certitude and yet the most securely founded of all certitudes. In the same way, the moral quality of the certitude about miracles takes nothing away from its stability. It is enough that the motives for it are solid and that they impose themselves on one whose view is in no way obscured.

d. *The connection between a miracle and the truth to which it testifies.* Finally, how strong is the link connecting the certitude of the truth attested by the miracle with the certitude about the miracle itself? We do not have to inquire whether the certitude about the miracle has been obtained and continues to endure for example, because of some weakness in the will. That would be taking up a question which is not of direct interest to our present study. But we must say that if the certitude about the miracle disappears, then the certitude about the truth attested by the miracle simply cannot stand. If the foundation collapses, the building it supports will crash in the same moral collapse. But since the certitude about a miracle depends upon moral dispositions as we have seen, so the certitude about the truth likewise depends upon them and to a similar degree.

Briefly then, it follows that these dispositions in the will must continue to exist after the acceptance of the attested truth, as an indispensable condition of that truth. But once this has been grasped, it is important at this point, more so than elsewhere, to recall the distinction set up between the motives for belief and the dispositions of the believer. Granted

that these dispositions are contingent, this does not keep the basis for belief from being metaphysical and absolute. In the present case, this basis is nothing else than God's truthfulness. God could neither work miracles nor allow them to be worked for the spread of falsehood. If certain events such as we have described were presented to a man, and if that man in using the path we indicated should err in his decision about them, then it is God Himself who would be leading him into error.

When it comes down to an actual concrete case, the miracle is expressly connected with the doctrine. For example, the wonder-worker refers to the miracle as proof of what he teaches. He tells his hearers, "To prove to you that I come from God, I am going to make this paralytic walk." And the paralytic walks. There are other connections of the same type that come from the circumstances in which the miracle takes place. When confronted with such a spectacle, the ordinary man who is free from any prejudice will always and invariably say, "The finger of God is there." He will say it instinctively, spontaneously, and naturally. On the other hand, a man who is aware of the difficulty and has a critical mind will arrive at the same conclusions, if his reflections follow the path marked out in this chapter in accord with the rules of logic, of prudence, and of moral integrity. He will conclude by rejecting every other explanation except the supernatural explanation.

And yet, despite all this, both of these men would be deceiving themselves! They would be deceiving themselves, and not accidentally through some circumstance of time, place, or character, through some ignorance or some special moral failing, but normally and naturally, by following the straightforward movement of their minds, by using all the intelligence, all the loyalty, and all the prudence that they have. Such an error would be forced upon them. They could not avoid it. And this error would touch upon the most important of problems; namely, the will of God towards His creatures, the channel of truth and goodness in religious and moral matters, and the path of salvation.

This whole case appears incredible if there is a just and truthful God. Such a God could not allow events that would necessitate an error of this type. He could not allow these intimate connections to be established precisely between some false teaching and these undeniable prodigies which are stamped with His seal. For such connections could not fail to bring about the unfortunate and irreparable aftermath that we mentioned.

For the same reason God could not permit some real or apparent prodigies that were performed by any sort of agent for the spread of error to be actually indistinguishable in themselves from divine miracles.<sup>55</sup>

This impossibility becomes more and more striking in proportion as the error spreads over more and more time and space. Should such a deception come to be accepted for several centuries by a large portion of mankind, it would be the greatest scandal imaginable. Consequently, if God takes an interest in the moral destiny of his creatures, it would be the greatest ward off this misfortune from them. He owes it to Himself to cause themselves and to put the blame on Him, they would have the right to repeat that famous saying, "Lord, if there is error here, it is You Yourself who have deceived us!"

#### A Note on the Preceding Chapter

##### I. "Inferior supernatural agents"

On a plane beneath God we can imagine, as has been done by those who write about wondrous events, that there are various good or evil supernatural agents, like spirits, demons, and so forth. We know of no argument *a priori* against their activity in our world.

It is very easy to scorn belief in "spirits," and to poke fun at those who hold such a belief. It is quite true that many people believe in these spirits for reasons that are perfectly ridiculous. The present question, however, is not concerned with such things, but wants a yes-or-no answer to the following: does reason furnish arguments that prove either the non-existence of the beings in question or the impossibility of their activity around us? No. Does positive science bring up any experimental proofs which point in the same direction? It certainly does offer some proof against such supernatural interventions as would be similar to the interventions of human freedom and as noticeable and ordinary as these latter are. The mysterious actors with which we are concerned are not constantly upon the stage of this world. But as for scientific proofs

<sup>55</sup> Could God even allow Himself in some way to authorize a teaching whose content was true but which falsely claimed to be revealed do not think so, providing His testimony bore precisely on the origin of the doctrine. For here again it would be a case of concealing error and leading man into idolatry, which consists in adoring words that come from men as if they came from God.

establishing in advance the impossibility of an occasional appearance by such a spirit — there are none. We proved this point sufficiently when treating of induction.

On the other hand, it is no more evident that anything decisive can be brought up in favor of the possibility or the antecedent probability of this special type of supernatural intervention. Without reference to a revelation, which is also in need of proof, the existence of such an intervention could only be proved by some observations of the fact.

We will content ourselves with waiting for the facts. Observing the facts will be very difficult since it is a question of supernatural agents acting as God's instruments; and how can we distinguish with certainty between their action and His? Fortunately, it is not important from the practical viewpoint to distinguish between an effect coming immediately from God alone and an action carried out by His orders. However, when evil preternatural agents act for immoral purposes, this very fact will render them certainly recognizable. Therefore, if it can be shown in this or that case, that a person found himself in the presence of a freedom that was malicious and distinct from human freedom, then the experimental proof of a non-divine supernatural reality would be furnished.

For the time being we will remain in ignorance about this question — in an unbiased ignorance that assumes no definitive nor unchangeable attitude, but rather holds itself in readiness to receive all the evidence that the facts may adduce. However, here again, let us note that all such information — although quite interesting and useful — will not be of capital importance. It is of far less importance for us to decide definitely whether the positive cause of some assuredly non-divine phenomenon is natural or preternatural, than it is for us to know whether God has revealed Himself to humanity. What does not come from Him can only have an indirect bearing on the direction of our moral and religious life, and its explanation can be postponed or suppressed without much loss.

##### II. "The cases that have no explanation"

It would be rash to pretend that an investigation concerning the marvellous will in all cases give us explanations that are completely clear and satisfying. We should expect to meet some obscure points, and perhaps, some enigmas that cannot be solved. We shall be neither amazed nor bothered by them. If a residue is left without explanation, it does not destroy the



explanations that have been gained. One group of facts may have revealed its cause while neighboring groups remain impenetrable. Partial science has its worth and does not imply omniscience.

#### CONCLUSION TO PART THE FIRST

Such is the philosophic attitude which we advocate for the study of wonders. It is the only one which does not run the risk of blocking off some pathway for the person who searches in good faith. It allows him to use the largest number and variety of principles for solving the problem — all the principles which the human mind has ever devised for the present question. Error or make-believe, known or unknown natural forces, intervention from God, or even — should their existence become factual — from other supernatural forces, become rejected *a priori*. Each one of these hypotheses can be re-jected *a priori*. Each one of these hypotheses can be valuable in its proper place, and none of them should be allowed to stifle the others. It is the examination of each individual case that will bring to light the particular hypothesis that fits. And if none of the hypotheses offers grounds for a definite solution, then a person has to be able to remain quietly in his doubts.

The detailed criticism which we made of the different positions always resulted in the same thing. It showed the narrowness and exclusivism of these positions. We admit everything that they admit as sources for an explanation plus some-thing else besides. In the real world there is some determinism and some contingency, something natural, and *perhaps* also something supernatural. Those who do not admit this latter possibility possess a freedom of thought that is far more re-stricted than ours. "In many cases, which might, but do not necessarily *have to*, be explained by the supernatural, we have the right of withholding our judgment. But those people never have such a right. Once they find themselves face to face with some wondrous happening or account, . . . they must come out with a dogmatic negative, no matter what kind of witnesses are on hand, no matter what be the condition of the text, its origin, the obvious meaning of the author, or his sources of information."

— B. Allo

## PART THE SECOND

### THE CRITICAL ATTITUDES PRESUPPOSED FOR THE EXAMINATION OF THE FACTS

When we determined the philosophical attitude with which a person might undertake an examination of the facts, we did not present a complete picture. This examination itself can be conducted along lines that are quite different. And at this point it is a good thing again to throw some light on the ground to be covered so that a person can choose the path to be followed in critical method as well as in philosophical attitude. The reason for this is that some people, who would agree about metaphysics, might nonetheless argue among themselves about history. And many people, who would have no objections against the possibilities hitherto mentioned, will now find the realm of experience bristling with difficulties. Hence, we are going to investigate what method a person should use in examining seemingly wondrous events and in forming an opinion about them.

## CHAPTER I

### FACTS THAT WE OURSELVES WITNESS

A few brief remarks will suffice at this point since the difficulties will arise more in connection with historical criticism. The difficulties which now present themselves will reappear in a larger and more widespread way upon the field of historical criticism.

When confronted with some fact that seems marvellous, a witness may discover that he is pulled by opposite tendencies in accord with his own opinions and temperament. These tendencies will prevent him either from getting a good view of the event he has seen or from interpreting it correctly. First of all, there are the tendencies in favor of wonders, such as credulity and a love for the extraordinary, religious enthusiasm and

excessive impressionability. All of these render the soul thoroughly susceptible to mental contagions. There is impetuosity in forming one's conclusions, as well as the urge to find apologetic proofs in such happenings, and so forth. Not one of these tendencies can be claimed to be simply non-existent; and we should be on our guard against all of them both in ourselves and in others.

On the other hand, we have the negative prejudices, the tendencies that are not in favor of wonders. Scepticism will keep a person from paying attention to them. Individualism will keep religious or philosophical matters to them. Individualism in anything coming from without. A good faith that is only half genuine will become apprehensive about the vast religious issues connected with verifying a miracle. Disdain for things that fascinate simple souls, human respect, and fear of disqualifying oneself by paying attention to the extraordinary — all of these will cause the mind to turn aside or to rest content with any sort of explanation at all.

All the tendencies just mentioned are more or less directly inspired by feeling or passion. But now we come to the purely intellectual instincts. If a thing is extraordinary, it is suspect both to common sense and to the scientific spirit. It turns upside down men's ordinary ways of acting — all those unconscious or conscious habits of theirs which have been tried and fashioned by experience and shown to be excellent for the uses of everyday life. So rather than accept some strange fact, a person will figure that he did not see or judge too well, that he became the plaything of some illusion or even of some hallucination.

Now this brand of prudence borders on a prepossession. To tell yourself that you have judged poorly is not always reasonable, nor is it always even possible. There are some reasons so simple and so evident that there is no way of getting around them; for example, a wound's being open or closed, a bone's well pondered and mature that it would show inconstancy to investigate them again. The hallucination hypothesis — which may be a bit humiliating, but is such an easy way out — cannot be used except for a special reason. Otherwise, one would be using the very truthfulness of one's own faculties, and the problem that has been raised would go right back to general psychology. Consequently, if a person has no preconceived ideas along universal lines, it is clear that having recourse to this hypothesis will only be rendered legitimate by reason of some accidental circumstances concerning the subject or the milieu or something else.

## CHAPTER II

### THE FACTS CERTIFIED BY ANOTHER'S TESTIMONY HISTORICAL CRITICISM OF WONDERS

#### SECTION I: GENERAL RULES

Everyone knows that psychological and metaphysical judgments are incorporated in historical appraisals. *Pure history* does not exist. This is why differences sometimes occur between historians who are equally well informed. As far as the criticism of wonders is concerned, there is one problem especially which comes up for discussion. This concerns the role which should be played in this matter by the philosophical ideas of the probable and improbable, of the possible and impossible. Both in the camp of those advocating miracles and among those opposed to them the opinions are far from being unanimous.

First Opinion: *Miracles are ruled out because of the notions of possible and impossible supplied by the experimental sciences, and this no matter what sort of testimony is witness to the miracles.*

Messieurs Langlois and Seignobos say that when "a fact obtained by a historical conclusion contradicts some scientific law, . . . the solution to the conflict is obvious." History must yield. The fact must be ruled out. Such a radical view cannot be allowed. The experimental sciences limit themselves to a statement about existing things and furnish no data about the possible and impossible. We have proved this when treating of inductive determinism.<sup>56</sup> Questions about possibility should be debated before a different tribunal than that of experimental science; namely, the tribunal of philosophy. And this is what both Messieurs Langlois and Seignobos admit without at all realizing it.

Moreover, the "conflict" which they point to is a completely imaginary one. If history should record some marvellous event, it would in no way be contradicting the sciences. These sciences give us the "law" — that is, the formula for what happens ordinarily.

<sup>56</sup> Cf. pp. 12 ff.

One isolated wondrous event, one exception produced by the interference of a cause that is ordinarily absent, would not destroy this law. And after all, it would be very unreasonable, even from a scientific point of view, to establish the general rule that a fact may not be admitted unless it conforms with facts already known. This would be to suppose that no new facts ever occur, and it would limit the scope of the idea of what is possible to the extension of present-day science. In the past, when this general rule was applied, it brought about the most regrettable results. Certain facts that were fortified with excellent testimony — facts like meteorites, stigmata, and so on — were in former days excluded from history as impossible. Agreeing on this point, Messieurs Langlois and Seignobos are forced to admit that the motive for this exclusion was ignorance pure and simple.

Second Opinion: *Miracles are ruled out because of the notions of probable and improbable.*

In the giving of human testimony some inaccuracy, be it deliberate or not, is always infinitely more probable than some supernatural exception to the laws of the universe. Consequently, the wise thing to do in every instance is to rest on the first explanation rather than the supernatural exception. The lesser of two miracles is always to be chosen. Such is the reasoning of Hume and Stuart Mill. This view has a semblance of truth because it makes use of principles that are undeniable in the realm of generalities. Its only flaw, however, is that it leaves them there.

If we look at events taken in general and as a whole, it is certain that miracles are far less likely *a priori* than common-places such as error or lying; for a miracle is a rare exception, a supernatural intervention that demands serious reasons. From such a point of view, a person would be right in expecting to find more fables than facts in the realm of wonders. But such a view does not solve any particular case.

In like manner, an excellent general rule for criticism has been established, stating that among several possible explanations "least miraculous." But once this choice is made, we must get down to the facts, one by one, and find out what is "the most likely explanation" for each one of them. Then the question takes on quite a different complexion. What is most frequent in the general run of things, *what is most probable if all the*

*cases are studied, is not the most likely in every particular case.* This holds true in all fields, even in those farthest removed from the criticism of wonders. Everybody knows that phenomena which are rare, exceptional, abnormal, and monstrous — for example, certain moral perversions — do appear upon investigation to be the only likely explanation in certain given circumstances. Nobody finds any difficulty in admitting such explanations when there are serious proofs adduced to guarantee them. *A priori*, however, and from an over-all point of view, they would rank as the least likely hypothesis. Consequently, if the principle of criticism just invoked is the only one employed, it will leave all the questions in suspense. Something is being added, and quite a bit, when one surreptitiously implies an equality between "the likely" and "the natural." These two words are not at all synonymous; and it is begging the question rather crudely to suppose that they are.<sup>57</sup>

Let us now apply the rules just formulated to the facts. These are reducible to two types.

*First Case.* A wondrous story is found recounted in some document. I examine its internal structure. I conclude that the supernatural *could* be there. There are many indications pointing in this direction. Here then is a probability beginning to form, a likelihood taking concrete shape around some reported event. It is true that I am aware of another probability opposed to this one; namely, that of error or of a lie. At this point in the investigation, these latter explanations still remain probable. But why should they be considered *more probable*? From the philosophical point of view that I have adopted,<sup>58</sup> and

<sup>57</sup> The alternative we are discussing should be conceived with rigorous accuracy. It is a question of choosing between two hypotheses that are considered possible, of choosing between these two alone, and of choosing before a person forms any preconceived notion about the reality of the concrete fact. This means, first of all, that a miracle is explicitly supposed as possible. It is this which makes the second opinion different from the first; for if the possibility of a miracle is not included, the alternative would no longer have any meaning, since one of its elements would have been ruled out. Secondly, it means that the two explanations exhaust the possibilities — on one side, a miracle; on the other, a lie or an error — without leaving any room for example, for some unknown natural cause. Lastly, it means that the weighing of the likelihoods takes place before judging the reality of the event. Otherwise the reason for weighing them would cease to exist.

<sup>58</sup> Cf. above, Part I, Chapter IV, Section 2, pp.

after verifying the concrete likelihoods that are sketched in the narrative, I find it impossible to bestow any prejudiced favor upon these unfavorable explanations.

It may even be that the antecedent probability of a lie or error is reduced even more by the nature of the events reported, and with facts known from other sources, as well as by the moral beauty and beneficial results of the events. But to be brief, so long as this probability (of a lie or an error) subsists, it is the documents that have the final word. It is these documents and these alone that will decide between the conflicting hypotheses.

But we meet in history some unimpeachable documents that allow us to rule out the very possibility of error and fraud with certainty. Suppose that here and now such is the case. Then the question is solved. The fact is real and it is a miracle. Then can such a conclusion be avoided? It was the very principles of Hume and Stuart Mill that brought us to it. Once it has been granted that the testimony adduced is of high quality, then the non-existence of the fact would be a genuine moral prodigy, "a greater miracle" than its existence. For to have competent, sincere, and well-informed witnesses testify to error would be a completely inexplicable event — we would even say absurd and contradictory.

*Second Case.* Let us press the analysis of the problem to the point where it gives rise to conflicting considerations. We are faced with contingencies more difficult to appraise than before. I am thinking now of accounts of wonders that bear likelihood in it that favors a supernatural intervention from God. It is an obscure wonder, without any noteworthy spiritual reverberations and without much apparent usefulness. It was formed for the benefit of some individual or some small group to satisfy a lowly desire or to enhance the halo of some saintly personage with a passing ray of glory. Of course, God is infinitely good, and quite capable of condescending to answer the longings of a childlike piety; and moreover, His designs can lie beyond our grasp. However, the fact remains that *a priori* there seems to be no positive reason why He should be manifested in this way and in this place in preference to every other situation. The contrary is more probable.

On the other hand, one finds it impossible in this case to accept the idea of a lesser supernatural agent — for example, a diabolical power. The moral milieu, the character of the

wonder-worker, the results following the event, the neighborhood where other authentic divine marvels have occurred, and so on are all against such an idea. Nor is there any more probability in favor of some unknown natural cause intervening at this spot *ad nutum*, and never showing up again. No, the only solid likelihood is that of pious make-believe. There is an antecedent probability, a very strong likelihood, that we are in the land of legend. Before consulting the testimony, we feel ourselves quite justly inclined towards admitting error or fraud in this case.

But now, look at the documents, and see how sharply they contradict our diagnosis. It is a sudden change of scene. Backed up by the clearest possible documentary support, the fact turns out to be real. What was previously devoid of likelihood and had in its favor only a bare possibility now compels recognition. There is no getting out of it:

"The truth may sometimes be what doesn't look like truth."  
A person does not decide whether a thing is real by simply balancing probabilities. Some element of reality itself must appear, and like some irresistible weight it must pull the question at issue down with itself into the realm of certainties. In the present case, it is the testimony that plays this role. The tiniest speck of reality has more weight just by itself than a mountain of likelihoods.

Now that the hypothetical case has been changed so radically, to what are we going to attribute the prodigy? At this point we can no longer keep abstracting from likelihoods. A fact that is certified as true does not have to be likely. But an explanation that is unlikely will not be an explanation. The causal influence producing an event does not manifest itself as the event does. In searching out this influence, reason goes into the unknown. It determines the cause by taking its stand upon its plausibility. It chooses the cause from among others either because of its greater probability, or at least because all the others seem positively improbable. However, in our present case, only one cause has not been excluded absolutely. We have noted certain tenuous, fleeting probabilities pointing to a divine intervention; and these were counterbalanced by some very strong probabilities in favor of the story's being fictitious — *but not in favor of any other cause, if we suppose that the fact was real.* Hence, once the fiction has been excluded, divine intervention is the only thing left that can be admitted. It becomes likely a *posteriori*, because of the considerable change introduced into the data of the problem by the fact's actual occurrence which is

now recognized. Consequently, if no new evidence comes in to alter the state of the question radically, we will be forced to conclude humbly that we are here in the presence of a miracle that was unexpected, but real.

**Third Opinion:** *In the criticism of wonders, no consideration should be paid to the ideas of the possible or impossible, but only to the value of the testimonies.*

Many apologists for Christianity uphold this opinion which is the exact opposite of those just examined. This opinion seems exaggerated to us. We think that the intrinsic likelihood of events is a datum of reality and not pure make-believe. Reason and reflective thinking are grounded upon this likelihood, and therefore it should be taken into consideration. This will become clear as we vindicate the following opinion, which we adopt as our own.

**Fourth Opinion:** *The ideas of the possible and impossible, of the probable and improbable, ought to be considered along with the estimate of the value of the testimony.*

Why should we make an exception in favor of miracles by not following the method used in all other matters? When facts are proposed for our acceptance, they always set before our eyes a twofold coefficient — the one being the value of the testimony upon which the facts are based, the other being the intrinsic possibility or probability of these facts. And if one of these coefficients is low, we insist that the other be increased proportionately. A commonplace account, narrating ordinary daily facts, is accepted on any kind of testimony; there is no indication that it might have been invented. But the same does not hold true of a story that is quite exceptional, very exciting, and genuinely surprising. Before putting our faith in such a story, we demand better guarantees. Finally, there are some tales so extravagant that we simply cannot put faith in them. This is the view of common sense, and of a critical sense as well. Historians and theorists about the historical sense as lievers and non-believers, Father de Smedt as well as Messieurs Langlois and Seignobos vie with each other in acknowledging

the value of this internal criterion. How then should one endeavor to prove its illegitimacy when applied to some special subject like that of wonders?

What the apologists really fear is that miracles will not stand up if this criterion is used, since miracles are extraordinary phenomena. These fears lack all foundation. Judgments about possibility and probability have their place and usefulness in a study of documents concerning wonders just as much as they do in other studies, and even more so.

a) *Judgments about probability.* We have shown how judgments about probability are used in regard to the second opinion that we examined. When looked at in general, a miracle is more unlikely than any natural phenomenon whatsoever. For it to become *admissible a priori*, some distinct and peculiar circumstances that are quite exceptional in their own way must alter this lack of likelihood in some particular case. In order for the miracle to be *admitted*, there must be testimonies that are bolstered by strict guarantees — guarantees that become all the stronger in proportion as the concrete likelihoods diminish. All enlightened believers view the situation in this way. Tribunals for canonization debate about miracles with a superabundance of precaution, which they dispense with when verifying other important traits in the lives of the saints.

b) *Judgments about possibility.* Here the question becomes far more delicate. An event that is absolutely impossible can never be admitted. An instance of this would be something that is intrinsically contradictory, or something to which could be assigned neither a cause capable of producing it nor a purpose that could justify it. Just because a person admits a God and spirits and demons does not at all mean that he has good grounds for attributing whatsoever he likes to them. This would not be logical. For these supernatural beings also have their "nature," which rules out certain actions or manifestations for them. For example, actions that are purposeless or immoral are beyond God's power. To decide that the wondrous events contained in a fairy tale are unreal does not take an investigation of the testimony upon which the story rests. The intrinsic nature of the events is enough to classify them. The same thing holds true for the extravagant and purposeless marvels recounted in certain religious legends.

Let us remember, however, that the norm about which we are speaking cannot be handled with too much circumspection. We have already seen what stupid mistakes resulted from using this

norm too enthusiastically and precipitately.<sup>59</sup> Let us not confuse the unexplained with the impossible, nor a physical law whose necessity is not absolute with a mathematical or meta-designs may lie beyond our grasp and can be disconcerting to us. Consequently, let us not come out with the word *impossible* unless we are confronted with an obvious absurdity.

Should we propose the extreme case in which a conflict would appear to exist between the testimony and the intrinsic possibility of the facts? Can our two coefficients have contradictory meanings and thus cancel out each other? What solution exists if an excellent testimony has as its object an obvious absurdity? Here is a conflict far more keen and fundamental than the one mentioned above which arose from pure lack of likelihood. Briefly then, can such a conflict occur?

First of all, it is certain that this type of conflict could not take place in reality. It could only be caused by appearances, since what cannot exist cannot be observed and testified to validly. And moreover, it would seem to be a very difficult case, if the efforts of an enlightened and loyal investigator could not break through such appearances. Ordinarily, a deeper and more impartial examination of the philosophical questions implied in the judgment about possibility, or a more attentive consideration of the testimony will bring some weak point to light here or there. But whatever the case may be, and as long as the problem remains unsettled, the critic's task is clear. He must avoid any forced compromises that stem from a desire to reach a solution at any cost. He must suppress none of the data in the enquiry and allow it to exist as a complete unit without laying a finger on it.

## SECTION II: PARTICULAR RULES FOR THE VARIOUS TYPES OF CRITICISM

### I. *Textual criticism, historical criticism, and interpretative criticism*

We will be brief about these preliminary operations in criticism, not because they contain no difficulties regarding wonders, but because these difficulties are difficulties of

<sup>59</sup> See p. 69. Cf. the many examples of this in *Introduction*, p. 176, note 2.

application and cannot be clearly understood without some details and examples that have no place in a resumé like this.

1. *Textual criticism*, which consists in establishing the exact wording of a document, can be influenced by preoccupations connected with wonders. If the text is read this way, the wonder is brought in; while reading it another way does away with it.

2. Regarding *historical criticism*, which investigates the origin of the document, its author, its sources, and so on, it is fitting to recall two general laws of psychology that are very important for the subject with which we are now concerned.

(a) Historical data that have not yet become fixed are likely to undergo changes in proportion to the number of intermediaries transmitting them. This transformation takes place especially along the lines of exaggeration and embellishment.

(b) The farther removed these facts are in time or place, the easier this deformation becomes; the closer they are, the less need there is to believe such a deformation may have taken place.

From these facts there flow the following consequences. The wondrous event that has been handed down from mouth to mouth for a considerable length of time will be quite deservedly suspect of having been embellished along the way, and this suspicion will be increased just as much as the transmission route is lengthened. The wondrous event that is contained in a document bearing a later date will deserve just as much caution, for the wonder has had the time to take shape as the product of the laws just mentioned. But the case is different when the wonder is reported by one who lives at the time of and close to the facts. Conversely, wondrous events can be used to date a document. If wonders abound in some document of unknown date, this points to the improbability of the document's antiquity.

3. *Interpretative criticism* has as its end to determine what is the meaning of the document, what the author wanted to say, and what he was trying to have us believe. It includes that whole complex of delicate analyses wherein the abilities of the philologist or the humanist have as much a part to play as does the insight of the psychologist. The same words can be understood in their literal or in their figurative meaning. Of the declarative statements, some are intended to put forth a solid historical truth, others are there only for the sake of eloquence or description or ornamentation. A writer of this sort may have wished to draw up an apology, or an allegory, or some symbolical narrative, or, perhaps, an historical novel or a pious fiction, and not an historical account in the strict sense.

How are we going to penetrate into the writer's meaning and distinguish the reality he intended to communicate from the literary devices he employed? There are many clues that can help us here. We might mention, for example, the nature of the incidents narrated, the light or serious tone of the author, the technique of his composition, the more or less realistic temperament and behavior of his characters when they come on stage, the more or less artistic character of the narrative, the use of descriptive commonplace, of cadence, of settings used before, the degree of accuracy found in his links with concrete reality, the presence or absence of details that allow one to locate the event in time and place, and so on. You can see how complicated all this is and how an account interwoven with wondrous events might not contain a single indication that the wonders were real.

## II. *Criticism of the testimony, or historical criticism properly so called.*

Once the document's exact text and meaning as well as its author and date are known, then the time comes to make use of the document from a historical point of view. How valuable is the testimony which it transmits to us? In order for such testimony to be accepted, certain conditions have to be fulfilled concerning both the facts attested and the character of the witnesses.

1. *Conditions concerning the facts.* a) A person will accept the facts with greater or less caution in proportion as the facts are public or private in nature, known by experience or by conjecture, by everybody or by a few, and capable of an easy check or not. Strange happenings that took place in broad daylight will be less suspect than those that are cloaked in mystery.

b) While the miracle is an extraordinary fact and can occur when not expected, this does not at all mean that it is therefore essentially unobservable, as Edouard Le Roy has claimed. As a matter of fact, an onlooker can see an event that takes him by surprise, and he can see it quite well. Surely not all the effects of surprise are unfortunate. Surprise vigorously stirs up our attention; and instead of dulling our sense faculties, it puts a keen edge on them. Moreover, in certain places and around certain people, miracles sprout up in large numbers. Such circumstances — which are real exceptions, even though instances of them are encountered in almost every age — do promote the observation of wonders to a striking degree. Then, too, a miracle is not an essentially "fleeting" phenomenon, as the same

author maintains. It is not something like an elusive flash of lightning. For usually a person can give leisurely study to the situation both before and after the event; for instance, when there is question of a bone that was broken and then is knit together, or of a purulent wound that has been healed, and so forth.

c) In order to have sufficient control over a miracle, is it necessary for it to behave like a laboratory experiment, so that it can be produced and repeated at will under the circumstances chosen by the experimenter? Voltaire and Renan have put forth such demands. The "commission of physiologists, physicists, chemists, and so on," of which Renan dreamed, has become famous. Others are loud in their protests that they will believe nothing unless certain processes of control have been used which are not the only possible methods; for example, the use of X-ray when there is question of a fracture.

These requirements show a lack of reasonableness. Why demand such means of observation if other methods are sufficient? A broken bone can be discovered most certainly without being X-rayed. On the other hand, some certainties drawn from direct observation are not a bit less firm than those drawn from experimentation. Astronomy, which is a well-founded and exact science, contains a large number of certainties like this; for the stars do not step down into the observatories in order that they can be handled and controlled by men. Moreover, there are a number of natural phenomena that are rare, exceptional, and erratic. These have to be recorded precisely at the place and time they occur. They not only escape man's control but also his foresight. These phenomena may be excellent raw material for the science of tomorrow, but for the present they do not allow us to discover their laws; they recur only at long, irregular intervals.

Should a person reject these phenomena on such grounds? He should, if he would impose on them the same requirements that are forced upon miracles. An historical event takes place only once. Are people going to ask that it take place again just as they wish before they will believe it? We have to take the facts as they are, together with the precise circumstances in which they are clothed. We should not force them into some official uniform that they have to wear under pain of not passing muster. We do not have to furnish these phenomena with a schedule to be followed, but must bring ourselves into line with theirs. This is the only scientific procedure. The lofty requirements of seances in an amphitheater and of academic

commissions dreamed up by Voltaire or Renan are a bit exaggerated.

According to a famous dictum, the scientific spirit consists in "submitting to the facts." Therefore, if it really is a free agent who is producing the wonders, how do you know that he will consent to keep in step with all your caprices, that he will judge that it is good, useful, and in accord with his dignity and purposes to act or refrain from acting precisely in those conditions which you have excogitated? And if this free agent is an infinite God who deserves the greatest possible respect, and if it is actually He who is said to resist the proud and grant His favor to the humble, do you think that such an attitude would influence Him to manifest Himself? If in the data placed before your eyes you have everything that you need to become convinced, provided you are willing to examine these data, why do you wish more to be given you?

2. *Conditions concerning the persons.* All the difficulties on this point are summarized in a certain number of exceptions that are usually thrown up against statements about wonders. Right from the start, certain types of people are ruled out as suspect; and this takes in at least the larger portion — if not the whole assembly — of possible witnesses. A few general statements about the lack of critical spirit in the ancients, about lying being in the blood of certain races, about the ardent enthusiasm of the faithful, about the lack of judgment in the common folk, or the disturbed mentality of mobs, and so on, are enough to erect a composite block against any testimony that favors wonders. This is a very easy way out of an embarrassing situation. It is quite necessary to consider this point a bit more closely.

A. *THE ANCIENTS.* The idea that the authors of antiquity were in all seriousness accorded some sort of "permission to lie" is pure phantasy. The basis for this idea is a false interpretation of texts.<sup>80</sup> Nor is it any more accurate to attribute indiscriminately to the "ancients" the idea that history is merely a field for inventive literary creations. Among these ancient writers are men who unquestionably are concerned about the objective truth of what they report; for example, Thucydides and Tacitus. It is Cicero who is the source of that famous, oft-cited dictum which sums up the historian's duties in conscience: "*Ne quid falsi audeat; ne quid veri non audeat.*" ("Let him not dare to say anything false, nor fear to say anything true.")

<sup>80</sup> Cf. *Introduction*, p. 329, note 3.

The following admission should be made — at least in regard to certain ancient writers, for not even this holds true for all of them. Of the two steps involved in the historian's labor — namely, the documentary research and the composition — the second was the one which the ancients described and possibly appreciated more than anything else. Those among the early historians who were most intelligent and sincere achieved some type of critical work by instinct. But it is evident that they did not delve down nearly so deeply into historical method as has been done during the past three or four centuries. They did not use reflexion and analysis to grasp the rules of this delicate, complicated science whose theory is quite recent. Perhaps they did not set a fitting value on the importance and the difficulties of these rules. But as a compensating factor, artistic carefulness was developed to a high degree among them. Cicero tells us that history should be "ornate"; and this does not mean that history should embellish the facts, but that these facts should be arranged in an attractive style. There is a way of polishing the facts without changing them. Moreover, literary carefulness has not disappeared among modern historians; nor can it disappear from history as such, since it belongs to the nature of historical composition.

Therefore, as regards the ancients and those who have inherited their style in later ages, it is both fair and prudent not to proceed by means of sweeping prohibitions. Among those ancients we will find some pleasant story-tellers, some brash prevaricators, and also some conscientious scholars. Each one must be studied individually to find out the amount of confidence he deserves. In particular, each work must be studied to discover in what degree the author's care to produce a work of art may have outweighed his pains to produce a work of truth.

B. *THE MIDDLE AGES.* a) In the Middle Ages literary manners were not what they are today, and on that score there need be no difficulty in admitting we have made progress. At that period plagiarism was not regarded as thievery. People ransacked the works of another writer without scruple and plucked from them the descriptions or arguments or speeches that would fit the end they had in view. In this way "stock" miracles passed from the life of one saint into that of another. A very crude concern for references allowed a pseudo-epigraphical literature to sprout up and deceive the non-suspecting reader. For example, one could see in circulation some hagiographical accounts that were headed with the name of the saint's disciples or companions in order to gain authority.



For the most part, however, these simple frauds can be easily recognized. Their falsifying techniques are barefaced and awkward, and our modern criticism does not find in them much scope for very involved siftings. Moreover, these failings do not discredit the Middle Ages in their entirety — and that is the important thing. For alongside these plagiarisms and pseudo-epigraphic writings, there exist perfectly authentic accounts that come from original sources. This even holds true of the hagiography of that period. These works came from witnesses who believed they had seen miracles and told their accounts with an unquestionable sincerity.

b) A more serious charge, at least from the historical if not from the moral point of view, is our ancestors' proverbial credulity and their eagerness for wondrous events. If their excesses in this matter were as radical and actually as extensive as is claimed, that ends it. For them every medieval document about miracles would remain under a blanket of suspicion. However, if closer attention is given to this matter, one realizes that this widespread depreciation implies a generalization and an extension that are simply unfair.

The teaching of the Church, which was generally received during the Middle Ages, always gave miracles a position of secondary importance in the lives of the saints. You can sense the influence of this teaching upon the saints' biographers of this period. Some of them focus their attention and interest on the holiness of the saints rather than upon their miracles and encounter some biographers who limit themselves to a description of the virtues and exterior lives of their heroes, without placing the halo of "wonder-worker" upon their brows, without will hear those tellers of wondrous events, the *mirabiliaarii* — who should apparently be the ones most in love with the interior marvels of grace.

And there is another element. The tendency towards criticism is so deep an instinct in the human mind that no one can really expect to see it totally eclipsed everywhere. Man has always been somewhat suspicious of the words of his fellowman. Thus, even in the Middle Ages, even among priests and monks, there were men who did not at all like the idea of being "taken in." There were "exploders of legends." There were writers who tore off the mask from fake miracles, who became indignant at them, or treated them with ridicule. Consequently, here again the prudent thing is not to pass any verdict except upon

individual cases. The mere fact that an author is from the Middle Ages is not enough to make him unworthy of belief.

C. *THE ORIENT*. These same remarks should be repeated in regard to the psychology of "the Oriental," as sketched by Renan. He endows every story-teller from the Orient with the two following traits: complete lack of concern for objective truth; inability, when faced with facts, to adopt a different attitude than that of art or experience or emotion. These traits would be like some incurable blemish or a defect that is congenital to a race. And these sweeping statements are used to support some very definite conclusions against the Bible and the Gospels.

However, the Orient, and especially that part of the Orient of which Renan is speaking, has produced something besides legend. There are some works both among the canonical writers as well as outside their circle which no critic may allow himself to disregard — no matter how little faith he possesses. The Jew, Flavius Josephus, despite all that could be brought against him, is a genuine historian. The authors of *The Books of Kings* or of the first book of *Maccabees* are sober-minded annalists who intend to give us exact information about facts. They are not "haggidists" [imaginative moralizers] that would not be bothered about truth or error. St. Mark is the model of the guileless historian who is straightforward with his convictions. St. Luke is a conscientious writer who is preoccupied with exactness. These are all undeniable facts. In the Orient, as in other places, one meets with historical sources worthy of trust. The proof of this lies in the fact that some people, while not believing in miracles at all, do draw heavily and confidently upon these sources to compose their *Lives of Jesus* or their *Histories of the People of Israel*.

D. *THE NON-PROFESSIONALS*. Is special training necessary to recognize a miracle? We have heard Voltaire and Renan requiring the erection of scientific commissions for this purpose. And in our days some non-believing doctors, who carefully study the cures at Lourdes, completely reject all testimony that does not come from fellow-doctors. Obviously, such a procedure is a very effective way of getting rid of miracles. But it has no right at all to be ranked among those procedures which are inspired by impartial investigation.

Why discard as completely worthless the testimony of a man of good sense and sound judgment who speaks about events that took place before his own eyes? Medical training can purify the findings, and it can direct attention into certain important

channels; but does this mean that every person who lacks this medical training will perceive nothing? Does it mean that some simple, striking, external phenomenon — such as a hemorrhage, a running wound, and so on — requires scientific learning in order to be *perceived*? It will only be the expert who can explain these phenomena thoroughly; but he is not the only one who can verify them. Moreover, doctors base about half of their diagnosis upon the information gathered from the sick person or from those around him. By this very fact doctors admit that observations made by ordinary folk have some value in their eyes. One of these doctors put this truth humorously when speaking about recent controversies, "It doesn't take a tailor to see that a coat has holes."

No doubt an extraordinary phenomenon does demand more rigorous control; but this does not mean that the specialist *alone* is capable, nor even that he is *always capable* of exercising this control. Just as a doctor, despite all his skills, can become distracted, can give superficial or improper attention, and can err in jotting down something he saw, so too, some unskilled person may possibly bring penetrating insight and scrupulous attention to the task. The only thing that matters is to know whether the phenomenon has been seen and described just as it took place. Once this has been proved, the professional rank of the witness matters little.

#### E. CROWDS: CONTAGIOUS IDEAS AND GROUP HALLUCINATIONS.

The inferiority of crowds in evaluating events can be considered from two different points of view. The complaint can be made that examining facts in a crowd is difficult, for the observer finds himself swept along in the current of the crowd where vague indefinite rumors spring up that can be exaggerated as they go the rounds. But this is only a combination of *normal* circumstances. What is more, these difficulties are not found in every crowd, nor are they insurmountable. Certain events are so visible that a large number of people can make sure of them at one and the same time. And often enough, everyone can leisurely re-examine the events and verify them for himself. We have all learned from experience that, even in a crowd, a prudent man is not irresistibly swept along by the current of rumors spreading out from unknown sources. Besides this, the crowd has certain advantages over isolated witnesses. If the persons composing the crowd preserve their normal state, they create a courtroom in which the numerous jury-members with their varying opinions and temperaments

form independent verdicts that serve as mutual checks upon each other. The very publicity of the proof is then a guarantee against fraud.

However, the pathology of crowds presents us with another point of view. Here the appearance of *abnormal* phenomena in large gatherings is emphasized. In crowds, persuasion is brought about without recourse to solid reasons or logic. An idea or an image induces hallucination, and mental contagion spreads everywhere. The chief cause of group hallucinations is what is called "wide-eyed expectancy." Renan says, "Expectancy ordinarily creates its objects." According to Dr. Gustave Le Bon, these morbid phenomena occur even in small groups. "As soon as several people get together, a crowd is formed... Immediately there disappears that power of discernment and critical spirit which each of them possesses."

Undoubtedly there is a grain of truth in these theories. Wide-eyed expectancy can produce hallucination in *special circumstances*. Mental contagion is a fact. The exception, however, should not be proposed as the rule. It is not true that the simple fact of becoming part of a crowd makes normal people lose their power to see and judge, and makes them blind and hallucinated. Personality is not at all wiped out in this crowd atmosphere. Divergent opinions still exist there. The large number of believers at places where miracles are thought to occur is not enough to convince the unbelievers about them. We see this happening today at Lourdes. Crowds may be divided. Within those vast expanses of human beings, various cross-currents of opinion often circulate, each one as powerful as the other. Then the claims of the enthusiastic believers run headlong into rock-like resistance and merciless requirements. Only Renan, with his quick pen, would risk that sweeping dictum: "Expectancy *ordinarily* creates its object." You can see quite frequently at Lourdes the most eager expectancy or the greatest yearning for a miracle or the most ardent petitions ending up in nothing. The cases of group hallucination in crowds are the exception. We have all been mixed up in crowds more than once — crowds that were quite enthusiastic — and yet we discovered nothing like that hallucination. To sum up then, a crowd is far more frequently not hallucinated than hallucinated.

What is more, when this thinking takes on the radical form which Dr. G. Le Bon professes, its final consequences are really absurd. This author informs us, "A crowd need not be large," to be suspected of hallucination. If this were once admitted, no historical testimony at all could stand. Everything

could be denied simply by having recourse to group hallucination. Even the concordant testimony of eye-witnesses, far from acting as a guarantee, would become a reason for being on one's guard.

F. *BELIEVERS*. Here is the most important class of rejected witnesses, a class in which some people think they find the greatest number of invalidating defects. They claim that religious belief gives the mind a strong leaning toward credulity, and that it develops in it an habitual tendency toward irrationality, and that it deadens the critical powers towards the irrational, this, religious belief undermines a man's morals. Besides to a religious enthusiasm which no longer heeds right or wrong, but is only concerned with what promotes some sacred cause. Thus speak Hume, Renan, and thousands of others. We must examine this indictment thoroughly.

1. *There is no constant connection between belief and error or fraud.*

a) The instances of error or fraud that are alleged against believers give no grounds for any general conclusion. Maybe the ranks of believers have contained some dupes and simpletons — and these in numbers as large as one might like. Maybe an interest in religion has inspired deliberate deceit at times. Nevertheless, these facts are not enough to prove that there is any constant connection between religious beliefs and misfortunes such as these. Just because it has been proved that certain believers are unreliable witnesses does not mean that a general prohibition has been established which rules out all testimony from believers.

b) Certain facts no less characteristic of believers can just as easily be alleged in support of the opposite view. These facts are actually so numerous and so forceful for an unbiased mind that one feels some embarrassment in bringing them forward. For example, there has been an energetic hunting down of error and deceit carried on within the bosom of Christianity and of Catholicism. Men of vigorous belief, who surely were not affected with any scepticism in this matter of miracles, have followed this hunt. For instance, the Belgian Jesuits, have made famous the name of Bollandists who have enemies for themselves since the seventeenth century who have absolutely unsparing openness in matters pertaining to the lives of the saints. Episcopal or pontifical investigations into miraculous events end up by eliminating more than two-thirds of such events.

Then the suspicion of deception which Hume and Renan try

to cast upon all believers, in order to strike particularly at Christians, has an especially poor foundation. For a natural alliance between the Christian Faith and dishonesty would be a very strange combination. In Christianity, lying really is a sin. This fact is recorded in a score of places in the Old and New Testament. And for rendering service to the God of the Christians, certainly no authorization is given for lying: "*Namquid indiget Deus mendacio vestro?*" ("Is God in need of your lie?") Actually, would it not be psychologically unlikely for such a clear-cut command always to be growing dim, as if by magic, among the very persons who are rightly considered the most zealous in religious matters? What non-believer of good will would dare, in his calmer moments, to say that such is the case? Who is he who cannot find, among all the Christians around him, some souls lofty enough not to be capable of stooping to deliberate religious trickery? The very least that can be said is that sincerity and honesty are not the exclusive property of non-believers.

c) Moreover, incredulity itself may also be connected with those defects for which the faith is blamed. Not all non-believers are enlightened, far-sighted persons; and at times "primitive" rationalism does invent some very amusing explanations concerning wonders. Strong anti-religious feeling can blind the mind and warp the will, nor are examples lacking wherein this feeling has inspired unfair attacks and calumnious charges. From instances of this sort no one will conclude that every non-believer employs such underhand methods, or even toys with the thought of them. I wish the same generalization were similarly avoided when the question concerns believers.

d) Conviction of any kind — be it true or false, pro or con — can occasion some unfortunate accidents within the mind that holds it. Such a mind is forced in season and out of season to search out reasons justifying the conviction, to defend it with makeshift arguments, and to push on blindly toward every conclusion that might strengthen it. Besides this, it sometimes happens that in the unanalyzable jumble of feelings and perceptions, the heart tries to serve what it takes to be the truth by making use of deceit or treachery. Abuses like these are not at all necessary. They occur everywhere, and hence give no grounds for a prepossession against anything in particular.

2. *The relation of religious beliefs to error or fraud.*

It follows that the general exclusion which some wished to urge against all testimony coming from a believer cannot be admitted. What we have already said is sufficient proof of this.

However, we must study the question positively, and see what influence religious belief can exert upon a witness's statement about a miracle.

No difficulty can arise from the fact that the witness believes such a belief offers no grounds for suspecting either partiality or deceit. As a matter of fact, prejudice is not present since, by hypothesis, the influence of previous belief is excluded. Nor is any deceit present since, by hypothesis again, the witness believes what he says. Moreover, no situation exists in which the demand can be imposed upon witnesses that they are not to form any ideas for themselves about the meaning and import of the event they recount. You cannot reduce man to the role of a simple recording apparatus, nor is there any need of deadening his interpretative powers to safeguard the accuracy of his accounts and impressions.

Let us then pass on to the case that may stir up some discussion and doubts — the case which involves *antecedent beliefs*, which can influence the recognition of wondrous events and the testimony given about them. First of all, is it true that non-belief is the preferable attitude for forming such a judgment; and does it safeguard impartiality?

A. *The respective value of belief and non-belief in the investigation of wonders.*<sup>81</sup>

There is an *accidental trustworthiness* which clings to testimony contrary to the convictions of the witness. It is obvious that a wondrous event becomes much more worthy of belief if a non-believer testifies to the basic facts of the case. And it is just as certain that a miracle no longer possesses much credit when it has been rejected by those whose faith it would have strengthened and who are disposed by this very faith to admit its existence. From this purely external viewpoint it is sometimes the non-believer, sometimes the believer, who enjoys the upper hand as occasion serves. Being in inverse proportion here, the advantages balance each other, so that there is no argument on this score.

But what we have to compare are two intellectual attitudes, considered in themselves, to see the advantages which each

<sup>81</sup> The non-belief mentioned here is not the methodical and conditioned doubt that is always ready to yield to proofs of fact. Rather it is that fixed negative attitude which holds for certain that the real wonder neither exists nor can exist.

Belief here simply means the acceptance of miracles or of any other data that would lead to such acceptance.

bestows *naturally and ordinarily* upon those persons who have adopted them. This is the way the objection contrasts the two attitudes. Without forming any verdict concerning what is believed or evaluating the motives for non-belief, a person simply sets one attitude over against the other to see what advantages each offers for an investigation of wonders. And it is alleged that the believer, by the simple fact that he is a believer, and independently of the quality of his belief, finds himself in a disadvantageous position. This is what we are going to examine.

There is no constant connection or necessity that links belief with bias and stupidity or non-belief with correctness of judgment and of will. Within different minds, any idea or any conviction can form associations that are either helpful or harmful, without at all losing its own inner worth. That much we can take for granted.<sup>82</sup> But the fact remains that antecedent belief in miracles naturally inclines the mind in a certain direction; it does make the acceptance of a new miracle easier. Actually, the problem about wonders is no longer wide open in the mind of the believer. At bottom it is solved; for him, miracles are possible and some have taken place. Consequently, whether one miracle more or less should take place does not stir up any special difficulty nor any particularly new problem. Moreover, it is obvious that the believer is interested in seeing his belief justified by some new proofs, since he would like to see others share his belief. And this may give rise to partiality or the use of dubious means in his efforts to persuade others. To be truthful about the matter, none of these effects of belief can be denied.

However, non-belief has precisely the same disadvantages. It also sets up a prejudice. Take, for instance, the case of a non-believer working right alongside his believing neighbor in the investigation of some wondrous event. Neither one nor the other is unconcerned about the result of this investigation. Each one naturally wants to see this research end in a justification of his own convictions and in a greater glorification of them before the eyes of everyone. Therefore, if the principle were laid down that a person had to be free of all interest before he could recognize facts clearly and testify to them sincerely, then both believers and non-believers would be equally suspect as witnesses.

On the other hand, however, the man who believes in wonders has some decided advantages over the non-believer. First of all, as regards the introductory question about the possibility of

<sup>82</sup> Cf. above, pp. 86-87.

a miracle, it is the believer who has the right answer. If the occurrence of a wondrous event is possible — as we already proved it is — then a person must be prepared to recognize it should it occur. The non-believer lacks this indispensable predisposition which the believer possesses. Moreover, the non-believer has based his intellectual position on a starting point that is erroneous. Now an erroneous starting point leads directly and by its very nature to other errors. But a true starting point is a precise instrument for research and can only be abused by accident.

And we can go a step farther. If other things are equal, the believer will find impartiality easier just because of his own presupposition. Actually, he has a freer field in which to move about. The reason for this is that his investigations into miracles can have more than one outcome. The results may be positive or negative, favorable or unfavorable. He is under no obligation to come up with a miracle in every case. There is nothing against his admitting many cases of deliberate trickery, of illusions, or of unexplained facts. But it is quite the contrary with the non-believer. He finds his path rigorously plotted and his goal marked out in advance. For him it is absolutely necessary that every case involve error or illusion. He cannot admit the slightest instance of a real wonder, because if just one exception were recognized, his thesis would go toppling to the ground.<sup>63</sup>

Lastly, not only does the believer bring a keener, more sympathetic curiosity and a livelier zest to the study of facts that are thought to be wonders; but he also is very much interested both in discovering whether God has actually intervened and in not confusing God's own activities with those of others. Here we have some excellent dispositions to begin an investigation. Of course, these can accidentally be impeded or overlaid by other dispositions. But the fact remains that they are natural to the believer just because he is a believer.

#### B. *The respective value of various beliefs in the investigation of wonders.*

What we have said thus far does not, however, exhaust the question. We cannot get to the bottom of it if we continue to disregard what is the quality of the beliefs and what are their truth and falsehood. We have already seen what is implied in every belief and what are its advantages over non-belief in the very fact that it is some type of belief. But this common ground

<sup>63</sup> Cf. Part I, Conclusion, p. 66.

of belief can be improved or altered depending on the way it is used. It is time to distinguish the various types of belief and to draw up rules that an investigation should follow in relation to each of these beliefs and its adherents.

a) *Ill-founded belief.* In examining a witness, an investigating committee may become certain about the falsehood and absurdity of his previous beliefs. Then it is obliged to take into consideration the harmful influence that such beliefs may exert upon the witness. Things like foolish tales and weird accounts from mythology and legends wherein wonders mushroom without rule or restraint do twist a man's mind and warp his sense of what is possible and probable. Certain practices of sorcery or of spiritism as well as a terror of the supernatural or a yearning for it do excite the soul excessively, keep it from seeing correctly, put it into a daze, and sometimes stultify it. Moreover, the dogmatic nonsense involved can have some practical repercussions. There are some legends that are both marvellous and immoral, filled with perverse examples and allurements. And if, as sometimes happens in certain unquiet circles, all this is tied up with charlatanism, imposture, or something still worse, there is no need of insisting on the cautions demanded by the "testimonies" arising from such sources.

Without going to such extremes, every case that is solved incorrectly creates an irksome precedent for the solution of similar cases. Since the question of miracles is so important from a religious point of view, it could also happen that an erroneous belief in this matter might have unfortunate moral reverberations. It is only the examination of the concrete circumstances that will reveal what the situation actually is. Lastly, the steps by which the error was introduced into a person's thinking may also reveal some defects such as levity, blind passion, and so forth. These will legitimately bar such a witness.

It is clear that in all these cases the advantages possessed by belief over non-belief will be counterbalanced by disadvantages more or less serious. There will be instances where one error is opposed by its opposite, and each will have a certain amount of influence against the other. It is difficult to decide in the abstract which error will be less harmful. The character and mentality of the individuals together with the nuance of the particular errors in this matter.

b) *True belief.* We have recognized the possibility of wonders. This obliges us to examine the case in which a wonder

would somewhere occur and a witness would have strong reason for believing in it.

If this should actually happen, it is clear that such a witness would definitely not be disqualified by his belief, and that his subsequent testimony would lose none of its force. What is more, since we know that he possesses the truth about a question that is connected with the one we are trying to solve, we should, if anything, put a special value on his judgment. Truth is the seed of truth. He who possesses truth has pushed farther into reality and is in a better position to see what is real. Truth is also the seed of honesty. A sound evaluation of divine and human realities is the foundation for right action. Therefore, providing all other things are equal, those people will be most trustworthy whose religious ideas are the most correct. And if authentic supernatural interventions have put a stamp of approval upon some code of conduct, then those who draw their inspiration from this code will by that very fact be more likely to be the most honest. The reason for this is that a moral code bearing divine approval would evidently be the best. Moreover, it would be the most effective restraint against dishonesty, for nowhere would an alliance between religion and fraud be less likely than where a moral code of this kind has been recognized.

However, it may be objected that as regards the believer there has been no removal of that tendency which we mentioned as naturally inclining him to be partial towards the object of his convictions. Obviously true. Against this tendency the believer does not have that exceptional bulwark which is *actual non-belief*. You cannot reasonably ask him to abandon that condition which he shares with anybody who professes a decided opinion about anything. Yet, at all events, this condition is a temptation for him — that is, an evil which is in the realm of pure possibility and which can remain there. On the other hand, the advantages pointed out above are real advantages at work in the here and now. It would really be strange if the very possession of speculative and moral truth created a barrier to anything, or if the truth, when once gained, were to be considered as a dangerous occasion of error!

c) *Belief of questionable worth*. But very frequently it will be difficult to decide in advance about the objective worth of the witness's belief. Then the only thing to do is to appraise the witness himself. Is he serious and honest? Would you say he is simple or clever, endowed with a sluggish or a creative imagination? Was he in a good position for seeing clearly the fact to which he testifies? Did he have means for deceiving

ers, supposing that he would have wished to do so? The answers to these questions will very frequently make further investigation unnecessary.

Actually, the witness may have given the event close attention and may be speaking sincerely in spite of his erroneous beliefs. If we have proof that such is the case, then the other circumstances matter little. Once it is known that the witness could not have spoken falsely, there is no need to bother about all the preceding causes which *might possibly* have led him to do so.

Supposing, therefore, that a witness should give his word about some wonder which we cannot check and which we think is unreal and perhaps even preposterous, nevertheless, in certain circumstances, we can put stock in his testimony.

At times belief in wonders hardly gives any support to the idea that miracles are possible — an idea which, let us not forget, is sound. People believe with an habitual, impersonal sort of belief, with some vague general idea, that miracles take place at times, that they did occur long ago. But they are matter for ancient history. Their details and sharp outlines have grown dim in the distance and have become blurred and indistinct from the use of religious teaching has made of them. It really would be astonishing to encounter such events in today's busy world. This kind of belief really adds very little to the simple undeveloped idea that miracles are possible.

Sometimes, too, the supernatural interpretation wherein the author's beliefs are reflected is purely an explanatory interpretation, subsequent to the facts both logically and chronologically. Thus it leaves undisturbed the data of his observation. And even when his interpretation has been found faulty, a person may be induced to retain the valid data which were enclosed by the interpretation without harm or distortion.

Finally, there are times when false or even absurd beliefs will not at all affect the powers needed for observing facts. People who imagine they have seen a phantom during the night do not on that account become unfit for recognizing in broad daylight that a broken leg has been reset. Other people who accept too easily the rumors circulating in a crowd will nonetheless be able to state quite exactly what they themselves have seen. Of course, there are borderline cases, obscured in the shadows; and there are elusive, indefinite phenomena that will be distorted by a preconceived notion. However, "there are some facts so obvious that it is difficult to see them awry." Such facts impose themselves forcibly upon the mind; and, to

speak figuratively, their impact chokes off the power to interpret them. Consequently, it can sometimes be stated that antecedent belief was present without influencing the observation of the facts.

At any rate, the mere fact of not being able to control a witness's views about wonders does not authorize a person to reject without fuller information all the testimony offered by the witness in this matter. For, first of all, these opinions are not clearly absurd since, by hypothesis, we do not know what should be thought of them. Besides, even though these opinions establish a precedent, as we have mentioned, they do not have a determining influence in evaluating new cases. No logical procedure nor any irresistible force leads from the admission of a miracle here and there to the admission of them everywhere. Of course, the logical fallacy of jumping from one particular case to another by the uneducated. And some reason must be at hand for supposing that this mistake has been made.

No more can the questionable value of an antecedent belief be enough, on moral grounds, to disqualify a witness. As a matter of fact, without knowing what his belief is worth, you will often be able to estimate its practical consequence by the varying degrees of directness, action, and extent characterizing its effects. Each error does not necessarily taint every move a man makes. And there are many errors from which you will not be able to draw anything that even resembles a positive incentive to dishonesty.

## CONCLUSION

These are the general principles which govern the question of miracles. Their complexity is summed up in the apologetic proposition which we undertook to prove; namely, that a divine wonder can occur and trustworthy means exist for discovering it. As a matter of fact, the principles are nothing but a complete unfolding of this proposition. They show us that this position is supported in each of its constitutive parts by motives which the mind can examine and by arguments from philosophy or historical criticism. It seems to us that a non-believer who tackles the question of wonders should first of all take his start from these motives and arguments. And if we are not taken, these may lead him both to handle this huge question as Christians who are Catholic do, and perhaps, later on, with the help of divine grace, to arrive at their conclusions.

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## II PERIODICALS

Abbreviations frequently employed for

Catholic Periodicals	
AER American Ecclesiastical Review	HJ Non-Catholic Periodicals
CBQ Catholic Biblical Quarterly	JR Hibbert Journal
IER Irish Ecclesiastical Review	JTS Journal of Religion
M Month	JTS Journal of Theological Studies
Tab Tablet	
TS Theological Studies	

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