

MIRACLES TODAY

The Biblical account of the Israelite and Jewish nation contains numerous reports of miracles attributed to Divine power. The Gospels, too, report a number of miracles performed by the Lord in His advent. By miracles we usually mean some unusual event or wonder brought about by Divine intervention, apparently in defiance of the normal laws of creation.

Generally speaking, Christians today believe that the age of miracles ended with the Apostolic Church. However, according to the Roman Catholic Church, miracles can still occur even to the present day. What do we in the New Church believe?

What we believe depends on our definition of the word “miracle.” If by “miracle” we mean an event contrary to the laws of creation, then we must concede that the age of miracles is over. But if we define “miracle” as an extraordinary wonder or marvel, then miracles continue. The Heavenly Doctrines themselves point to the propagation of plants and animals as examples of wonders that may be used to confirm a belief in the Divine.

Let us consider some instances of wonders and marvels that have occurred in just the last one hundred years:

Let us consider, for example, housing: Many people today live in accommodations surpassing that of Solomon, King of Israel, or of any of the other kings and queens in ancient history. And one does not have to be wealthy to do so. Methods of central heating go back to the days of the Greeks and Romans, but their systems were relatively rudimentary and depended on the burning of wood. A hundred years ago the methods were more sophisticated, consisting in urban and residential areas mostly of steam heat generated by a coal-burning furnace in the basement, a furnace which would have to be periodically stoked. Rural housing was heated mainly by wood stoves and fireplaces. And of course there were no thermostats. Today even the poorest houses have central heating governed by thermostats, and most are also air-conditioned, either by central units or window units. Worth mentioning also is the electrification of the nation, which is itself a relatively modern development, whose universality dates back to the early years of the 20th century.

Are these wonderful things miracles? They are if one considers that they are the products of human intellect and ingenuity, and that human understanding and imagination are the products of Divine inspiration.

Consider, too, food production. A hundred years ago most people were engaged in some form of agriculture. There were no supermarkets. Iceboxes were employed to refrigerate food, boxes that depended on the addition of a block of ice to cool their

contents. Diets were accordingly relatively limited. Today we enjoy a wide variety of foods, including fresh foods, from all over the nation and other countries, and this the year round. These fresh foods are conveyed to market by refrigerated trucks and airplanes, even to desert climates otherwise inhospitable to ocean products and to products grown in cooler regions, products which are then preserved in home refrigerators and freezers.

Are these wonderful things miracles? Again, they are, since they, too, have been brought about by human intellect and ingenuity, inspired by the inflowing of Divine life and power.

A hundred years ago many people still traveled by horse and buggy, and automobiles were in their infancy. Relatively few people owned one. There were no superhighways. Goods were transported by carts and primitive trucks through local roads that passed through one small town after another. Conveyance of people and products from the west coast to the east took two months or more. Today we enjoy travel by modern automobiles over freeways and expressways that our great grandparents could hardly imagine. Produce and goods can be shipped from one place to another in just hours, not weeks. No longer confined for the most part in the towns we were born in, we can, and do, travel by jet planes almost anywhere in the world.

Again, these developments and improvements are the products of human imagination and ingenuity, springing from a light and inspiration that are spiritual and not merely natural.

Or consider the advantages we enjoy in communications. A hundred years ago people depended on newspapers, on their radios (if they had one) and on movie theaters for news of the world. Today we still have newspapers and radios, but also television and the internet for our news. Whereas news before was often a day or two late, today it is almost instantaneous.

A hundred years ago, many people lacked telephones. Or if they had one, it might be connected to a party line shared by other subscribers. Today we have cell phones and smart phones that we carry around with us. In older days, if someone's automobile ceased to function out on the highway, he or she might have to walk miles to get help. Today we simply use our portable phones to call Triple-A or some other service for help to come while we wait.

Are these marvels and wonders not miracles?

We might reflect on the advances in science as well and on our new understanding in the areas of physics, chemistry and biology. As a result we now have satellites orbiting the earth, providing world-wide communications almost instantly, enabling news outlets to provide visual reports and interviews instantly from far-flung places. As a result we now have GPS units in our automobiles, replacing the need to find stopping places in order to examine maps. The universe is slowly giving up its secrets. Mars is now a subject

of interest beyond that of science fiction stories. Other galaxies are continually being discovered.

Are these not marvels and wonders that may be termed miracles?

Advances in science have been particularly beneficial in the area of medicine. Some diseases have for the most part been eradicated, including diseases that at one time proved fatal. Small pox, diphtheria, poliomyelitis, and others no longer pose threats to us or to our loved ones. Heart disease is now treatable. Great strides have been made in treating and curing various cancers. Surgeons today achieve miracles that earlier were not possible. Pharmaceutical houses have produced a vast array of medications and drugs that were not available before.

Are these not miraculous developments, worthy of being termed miracles?

Finally, we might mention the area of entertainment. In addition to board games, card games and party games such as our forebears may have enjoyed, we now have for our amusement cinematic achievements to dazzle us and divert us. We have radios in our automobiles to inform us and engage us, if only to provide us some company on the road. We have flat-screen televisions at home that are capable of receiving a multitude of cable channels, beyond our capacity to enjoy them all.

Are all of these developments not miracles? How would they have been viewed by our forebears a hundred years ago if they could have been granted foreknowledge of the remarkable achievements of our present day? Or how would they have been viewed by our forebears at the dawn of our nation?

Then let us consider also some phenomena for which we have no natural explanation. Let us consider electricity, for example. Science knows how it operates, but not really why. Even the fact of our molecular world — why should atoms exist as they do? And why should they form the compounds that they do? Physicists have determined the existence of four fundamental forces in creation: the strong nuclear force, the electromagnetic force, the weak nuclear force, and gravity. But they cannot explain the origin of these forces or why they should continue to operate. Yet they do operate, and have been in operation since the beginning of the created universe.

Much of these phenomena are understood, but not why they exist in the first place. Knowing the structure of an atom or the path of a charged particle does not explain their origin. Theorizing the origin of the universe from a single point does not explain the origin of that point or its explosion into the present ever-expanding universe.

It is within the bounds of reason to declare, then, that the whole of creation is itself a miracle. A continuing miracle, governed by the same physical and chemical laws that have existed from the beginning. If it were not so, creation could not have continued in existence. And yet no one can explain the origin of those laws. Only that they exist. But not why. All of these fundamental phenomena have, in short, no purely natural explanation, and as such may be termed miraculous.

But there is more. Inhabiting the inanimate universe is a vast multitude of life forms, forms in which there exist an ability to feed themselves and to reproduce themselves, from the least one-celled organism to the largest and most complex ones. The latter are not only able to feed themselves and to reproduce themselves; they exhibit as well an ability to think and to will. For these capacities of consciousness and volition there is no purely natural explanation. Inanimate and lifeless chemical substances have no capability in themselves of producing life forms. The inanimate does not produce the animate. The lifeless does not create life. Some other explanation must be found to explain the existence of life.

The fact is that life is the supreme miracle in creation. Decades ago scientists discovered in living cells the existence of twinned spirals of genetic material comprising chains of four amino acids in varied sequences. These are the basis of almost all life forms, and much is known about them; but it is not known how they variegate to form different life forms and different but cooperative organs in those life forms.

These chains of DNA—deoxyribonucleic acid—may be likened to a computer program consisting of chains of binary digits, each having either a positive or negative value. They are formed into chains by computer programmers. But there is no natural explanation for the formation of DNA chains or why they produce what they do. It is a miraculous occurrence. Evolutionists like to credit chance mutations for the formation of these chains, but in a world of physical and chemical laws there is no such thing as blind chance.

This is not the place to rehearse the evidence and argument for intelligent design in the development of life forms. It is enough to say that there is no purely natural explanation, and that is the definition of a miracle.

Consciousness and volition are in themselves supranatural. And so is life. Having no purely natural explanation for their existence, consciousness and volition must be acknowledged as miraculous, indeed as spiritual in origin and as inmosty Divine. In the last number of the book *Divine Love and Wisdom* (no. 432), the life in the human embryo and fetus is said to originate from a spiritual essence, whose initial form is a recipient vessel of love and wisdom, which in their essence are the Lord.

If the achievements we have related are miracles, and if life is itself the greatest of miracles, why then are they not recognized as such?

The obvious answer is that these achievements are today all commonplace and not unusual. Life is commonplace and not unusual. We are surrounded by it in plants and animals, and supremely in our fellow human beings.

But do the Heavenly Doctrines not tell us that miracles do not occur at this day because they compel belief? (*Secrets of Heaven* 5508:3, 7290:2, *Divine Providence* 130, *True Christian Religion* 501). Yes, they do. But miracles only compel if they are seen as miracles, and not if they are regarded as commonplace and attributable either to the

inherent nature of the universe or to the genius of men.

Not so for people who have already embraced the reality of the Divine and of the influence of the spiritual world. For them miraculous wonders and marvels do not compel, but rather confirm what they have already accepted in faith and life. They already know and believe that life flows in from God. They already know and believe that human genius is an inspiration of that inflowing life, life which is not confined by this natural world, but which is at once present in the world and yet transcendent.

As is said in the book *Divine Providence*, Divine providence and its laws are “now to be revealed, that people may ascribe to the Lord what is the Lord’s doing, and not ascribe to any person what is not the person’s doing.” (*Divine Providence* 70:1)

In the words of the 9th Psalm, “I will praise *You*, O LORD, with my whole heart; I will tell of all Your marvelous works.” (Psalm 9:1)