

ROMAN CATHOLICISM

In the Light of Scripture

by

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CHAPTER THIRTY-TWO

MIRACLES

WHETHER THERE ARE MIRACLES TODAY is not in question. All who believe the Bible accept the fact of miracles in Bible times, and there is no Scripture to indicate that miracles would end with the apostolic era.

Rome claims that she alone has the seal of continuing miracles, and regards this as a proof that her communion is the one true church of Christ on earth. She therefore makes much of miracles.

It is true that most Protestant churches lay no claim to the many miracles of which Rome boasts, but it is far from true to say that there are none. Down to this present day, God has heard the prayers of His children, and sends answers, which can only be called miraculous. We cite, for instance, the orphanage which George Müller established in Bristol, with the twofold purpose of caring for the many needy children of that time, and to demonstrate that God is still the living God and hears the prayers of those who believe His promises. That orphanage is still in existence, and although George Müller himself has long since gone to his reward, others have carried on his work on the principle of telling God alone of their needs. For a whole century those needs have been met without fail, the timing of gifts received not infrequently being too remarkable to be accounted for by coincidence. This institution is only one of many bearing like testimony to the intimate knowledge and care of God. He is faithful to all who walk in the pathway of His will, and trust Him wholly, whether they be Protestants or Catholics, even though the latter's true faith in God may be crusted over with irrelevant superstitions born of ignorance, "**The Lord looketh on the heart**" (I Samuel 16:7), and where He sees true living faith in Himself, He can and does work for those who cry to Him, miraculously if need be. We need not therefore be surprised if some real miracles do appear in the Roman Church, even though the majority of them we are convinced are spurious.

Concerning miracles, there are some things that we need to bear in mind:

1. *Bible miracles were not of continuous, regular occurrence.* They appeared at the beginning of each new dealing of God with His people, or in times of crisis. Miracles were frequent when Israel came out of Egypt, in the days of Elijah and Elisha, during the Babylonian captivity, in the time of our Lord, and during the apostolic era.

Between the time of Adam to the death of the Apostle John the occasions when miracles were prominent were few and brief. From the time when the Gospel was first attested by many infallible proofs (Acts 1:1-3), there has not been the same necessity for the witness of miracles apprehended by the senses, for we have the Holy Spirit to confirm the truth of the Gospel.

2. *The miracles of the New Testament all had practical value, to help, warn, or punish, as was necessary.* These elements are almost entirely lacking in the spate of Roman Catholic “miracles” which have been prominent in her history since the fourth century.

3. *The miracles of the Bible for the most part bear testimony to the whole body of divine revelation,* but Roman Catholic miracles nearly always attest particular things—to authenticate some relic or some place of pilgrimage, or to lend support to some particular doctrine, such as that of purgatory.

4. *The miracles of Scripture have a simplicity and dignity which attract and inspire greater faith in God.* The miracles of Rome, on the other hand, tend rather to excite wonder at a magical performance rather than to call forth worship of God. What spiritual value can there be in a crucifix which bowed its head to a worshiper, or an image of a virgin which moved its eyes, or a picture of a Madonna in Poland, which in 1949 wept tears of blood for the sufferings of the church in that land? We are told that a priest wiped away the tears, but other tears came, and thousands came to pray before it and offer their gifts.

In a church in Naples are two phials preserved in a casket which are said to contain the blood of a saint. Normally the blood is in the form of a fine powder, but three times every year, on the first Saturday in May, and on the 16th of September and December, it liquefies— at least, that is what we are told. It is then carried through the streets in a solemn procession led by a cardinal and other high church dignitaries. Those who worship this relic are promised deliverance from all calamities. The casket is sealed, and no scientist has ever been allowed to examine the phials or their contents. Everything has to be taken on trust.

5. *Many of Rome's miracles, true or false, tend to increase the wealth and prestige of the Church, and lead the worshippers yet more deeply into superstition.* Not a few Roman Catholic writers have expressed their disapproval over the years.

One of the best known places of pilgrimage in the world is at Lourdes, which is visited every year by hundreds of thousands of pilgrims, some going for healing, others to worship, and many more just out of curiosity as tourists.

On February 11, 1858, a local girl of fourteen said she had seen a vision of the Virgin there in a grotto. A spring of water was supposed to have sprung forth at that time, and thenceforward crowds of people came to see the wonder. The water was said to have healing power through the Virgin's merits. A church was built over the grotto and the fame of the shrine grew mightily. Not a few claimed healing and went away leaving their crutches behind. The proportion of those claiming this is very small and medical opinion is divided as to the real results. The special correspondent of the *Daily Telegraph* wrote on February 12, 1958, that in the past hundred years the Roman Church had recognized fifty-four miraculous healings at Lourdes. The requirement now is for a full medical dossier from the pilgrim's doctor and a ruling by a medical commission that the cure is medically inexplicable.

There is no doubt about the devotion of many who make the pilgrimage, but devotion notwithstanding, most of them return as they went.

One thing is absolutely certain: the pilgrims and tourists bring huge revenues to the Roman Catholic Church and also to the townspeople, the whole thing having become highly commercialized. Cardinal Gerlier, Archbishop of Lyons and Primate of Gaul, sang High Mass on the centenary day in the presence of seventeen bishops, ten of whom had come from abroad. The pope's recital of the Angelus was relayed from Rome to a congregation of forty thousand.

Six million people were expected to visit Lourdes one year, filling twenty-five thousand beds in six hundred hotels and pensions in the town and neighborhood. Pilgrims and tourists spend on an average between fifteen and thirty dollars on religious souvenirs and rosaries. The town of Lourdes alone spent some six million dollars in a recent ten-year period enlarging car-parks, lengthening runways, etc.

What a contrast is all this pomp and show beside our Lord's repeated avoidance of popular clamor!

In Mexico, Cuba, Argentina, Chile, and Portugal, there have been similar manifestations, and thousands crowd to worship. Although called by different names locally, the Church of Rome maintains that all these are manifestations of Mary.

Not so well known among non-Romanists is the use of the scapular and medals worn on the body. In spite of Rome's protestations to the contrary, these are charms to ward off evil influences, making the wearer a sharer in the merits of the particular Religious Order which issues them.

The scapular started as a vestment, consisting of a long piece of cloth with a hole through the middle through which the head was placed, leaving the two ends of the cloth to hang over the body in front and behind. With the passing of time this has been reduced to two small pieces of woolen cloth each about two by three inches, one for the breast and one for the back, joined by straps over the shoulders. The colors vary with the religious order, whether white, blue, red, or purple. On the cloth is printed or embroidered representations of the Virgin or the cross. Eighteen patterns of this charm are authorized, and any five may be worn at one time.

The most popular is the Carmelite Order, founded in 1156. Today it is open to all, with two million people wearing its scapular. Whoever does this, they claim, keeping himself pure and reciting the requisite daily prayers, secures two benefits:

- a. His body will be preserved from all calamity and attacks of the Devil.
- b. His soul will be saved.

Pope Clement in the twelfth century received a vision of the Holy Mother, and was assured that every Saturday she descends to purgatory and releases all the souls wearing this scapular.

In 1911 a medal was prepared, with the sacred heart embossed on one side and an image of the Virgin on the other. This may be worn as a substitute for the scapulars, conveying all their merits, but a new medal has to be bought every year and in some cases a monthly contribution is exacted as well.

Yet another amulet, but not for popular use, is the Agnus Dei, which consists of discs of various sizes made from the wax left over from candles used in worship.

On one side these bear the imprint of a lamb and a cross, and on the other the arms of the pope or the figure of some saint. The discs are prepared and blessed by the pope in the first year of his pontificate, and every seventh year thereafter. Some of these are bestowed as a special honor on cardinals and other people of rank and distinction, with the blessing pronounced upon them which has special mention of deliverance from perils by fire, flood, storm, pestilence, and childbirth.

Rome herself admits that they were probably introduced as a Christian substitute for the pagan charms current in Rome in the fifth century.

6. *The greatest miracle of all to which Rome lays claim, as we have seen, is that which is performed almost continually in point of time, in multitudinous places all over the world, when by the words of consecration at the sacrifice of the Mass, the wafer and the wine are said to be changed into the actual body and blood of our Lord, so to be offered to God and eaten by the communicant.*

But this “miracle” has no scientific basis whatsoever. Every power of apprehension used in ordinary judgment has to be denied to make this claim. And God, who has given us powers of observation and reason, does not ask that of us. Faith rises above reason, but it is not contrary to it. When it goes against reason, then it becomes incredulity and superstition.

~ end of chapter 32 ~

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