



CATHOLIC APOLOGETICS: PROPHECIES AND MIRACLES

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Who was the greatest messenger of God to mankind? His own Divine Son, **Jesus Christ**, Our Lord, true God, true Man. Born of the Virgin Mary, He lived and worked and taught among us, and died nailed to a cross.

By partial revelations delivered to the Patriarchs and the Jewish people, God prepared the way for the full and universal revelation He gave us through His Son. God foretold many things about Christ so that He might be known when He came.

SUMMARY OF PROOFS IN CHRISTIAN APOLOGETICS

1. Miracles and prophecies prove a revelation.

A preacher proves his claim to speak on God's behalf if miracles and prophecies support him. Miracles and prophecies are above the ability of creatures. Only God has the power to work a miracle and the knowledge to inspire a prophecy.

2. The Books of the New Testament (the Gospels, the Acts of the Apostles, the Epistles of Saint Paul) tell us the truth about Christ.

For the sake of our argument, we do not appeal to the inspired nature of these books. We regard them as merely secular records of past events. Treating them like any other historical source, we conclude that their account of Christ is true and must be accepted by anyone with an impartial mind.

3. History corroborates that the man Jesus Christ claimed to be God.

In these historical works, Christ appears as a teacher of religion. He does not present Himself merely as a messenger of God. *He claims to be God.* He expresses His claim in words and acts. He speaks as only God could have spoken. He acts as only God could have acted.

4. His miracles, prophecies and Resurrection proved His claim.

He could not have done these things if His claim was false: God would not have lent His divine power and knowledge to an impostor.

The message God gave us through Christ is supported by many miracles and prophecies, whose cumulative effect should compel conviction. It is supported by the great web of Messianic prophecies. It is supported by all Christ's miracles performed during His earthly life, and by the crowning miracle of His Resurrection from the dead. It is supported by the miraculous spread of Christianity and by the constancy of its martyrs. It is supported by the miraculous nature and vitality of the Church which has survived innumerable dangers, and lives in irrepressible vigor.

THE SIGNS OF A REVELATION: MIRACLES AND PROPHECY

How a Revelation may be known.

Certain men claimed that God revealed truths to them and commissioned them to speak in His name to mankind. We can know whether a teacher was sent by God if:

- 1) his doctrine is worthy of its alleged Author;** (it should not be ambiguous or trivial)
- 2) it is confirmed by miracles or prophecies.**

MIRACLES: a miracle is an occurrence outside the course of nature, perceptible to our senses, and only explained as a direct act of God Himself.

A miracle is God's positive testimony that a doctrine is true. God cannot testify to a lie.

The possibility of miracles cannot be denied by anyone who admits the existence of a personal God. A God Who fixed the course of nature can alter, suspend or supercede it at His pleasure. The next question is whether miracles have occurred or not: *the question of miracles is a question of evidence.*

Three points to consider in examining a miracle.

(1) Did it actually happen? We question the competence and veracity of the witnesses: Did they actually observe what they report? Can their words be trusted?

(2) Was it definitely outside the course of nature and/or above its power? Even without knowing everything about nature, we can still be absolutely certain that there are occurrences which are outside its course and above its power. When we find that something like this has actually happened, we can assert with firm conviction that it happened through the direct action of God Himself.

(3) Does the miracle prove a certain doctrine? This again is a question of the competence and veracity of the witnesses.

Under these three headings, the evidence in favor of miracles can be tested and controlled so that *we can have certainty regarding the miraculous nature of the occurrence and its confirmation of a doctrine.*

OBJECTIONS AND REPLIES

OBJECTION 1. *“Experience shows that miracles may be false. Experience also shows that testimonies may be false. False evidence will always be more probable than the reality of miracles.”*

REPLY: (a) This objection only states previous probabilities. But previous probabilities must yield to facts. The unlikely and the improbable sometimes happen! **Experience is knowledge of what we have personally seen and observed.**

Imagine someone who denied the existence of airplanes when they were first built, saying *“I could never experience such a thing. Therefore your evidence is probably false.”* Such a position would be unreasonable. Why? 1) they rejected the word of thoroughly reliable witnesses. 2) they disbelieve that an inventor could construct a machine capable of something outside all previous experience.

A person who refuses to believe in a properly attested miracle is unreasonable. Why? 1) he rejects the word of reliable witnesses. 2) he disbelieves the possibility that God may do something which people have never experienced before.

REPLY: (b) the evidence the Church requires for a miracle is always conclusive, never ‘probably false’. The Church is always slow to make a statement on a miracle because the evidence She accepts must always be so strong that if we refuse to accept it, we can never believe anything that anyone tells us and must reject all historical truth.

As G.K. Chesterton observed, *“Somehow or other an extraordinary idea has arisen that the disbelievers in miracles consider them coldly and fairly, while believers in miracles accept them only in connection with some dogma. The fact is quite the other way.*

“The believers in miracles accept them (rightly or wrongly) because they have evidence for them. The disbelievers in miracles deny them (rightly or wrongly) because they have a doctrine against them.” (Orthodoxy, 1908, Ch. IX)

OBJECTION 2. *“ Science’s developments and deeper insights into nature’s secrets have destroyed belief in every form (charms, magic, witchcraft, miracles, and astrology). Christian miracles belong to the childhood of the world, when people were prepared to believe almost anything.”*

REPLY: (a) The early Christians were not simpletons regarding Christianity’s greatest and most crucial miracle: the Resurrection of Christ. Actually, they were unwilling to believe it and accepted it only when overwhelmed by the evidence. Thomas the Apostle and Saul of Tarsus are two notable examples of disbelievers who were convinced by the evidence before their very eyes.

But is it true to say that the age in which they lived was the ‘childhood of the world’? Not at all.

Christianity appeared during an advanced, civilized era. The men who embraced it were formed by the intense, intellectual cultures of Greece and Rome, men focused on piercing legalities. Such minds were especially fitted for the task of sifting and judging the value of evidence. They embraced Christianity because they were convinced that the Resurrection of Christ - its basic miracle - was a fact.

REPLY: (b) Regarding the contention that science's advances destroy a need for belief, consider this: astrology, fortune-telling, spiritism, charms, mascots and so on have a strong hold over many people living in today's age of airbuses, super-computers and nuclear physics. Credulous simpletons *and* critical people exist in every moment history.

OBJECTION 3. "*Science claims that nature acts in a uniform manner. The doctrine of miracles says it does not. Therefore, if we believe in miracles, we must reject science.*"

REPLY: (a) There is no disagreement with scientists regarding the uniformity of nature. We also hold the general law of nature that the same physical cause in the same circumstances will produce the same effect. *But:* when God intervenes, the circumstances are no longer the same. A new power has been introduced. His rare interventions do not invalidate the work of a scientist, whose conclusions are based off normal cases.

REPLY: (b) Man himself can interfere with the forces of nature. If he holds a stone in his hand, he is preventing the law of gravity from producing its normal effect.

OBJECTION 4. "*God's interference in the course of nature may involve a violation of the Law of the Conservation of Energy. For example: say a miracle-worker commanded some quarry stones to assemble into a house. This act must happen with some new energy above the fixed amount already in the universe.*"

REPLY: (a) The Law of the Conservation of Energy remains intact. If the total energy of an isolated system is observed to increase, this Law means that *the increase is due to the entrance of some new energy.*

REPLY: (b) The miracle referred to may have been due merely to a re-distribution of energy. According to physicists themselves, there are vast stores of energy in the universe on which the Creator could draw, if He did not wish to introduce a new energy.

REPLY: (c) If God created energy to work the miracle, we have no difficulty in admitting that *the miracle overrides the ordinary laws of nature.* A scientist is concerned with those laws alone, and not with an agency extrinsic to them.

OBJECTION 5. "*Miracles may be the work of evil spirits.*"

REPLY: Evil spirits can seem to work miracles. But they are dependent on God like everything else in every instant for their very existence and ability to act. God will not permit them to deceive us. Their activity may be detected by the relative triviality or unimportance of the wonder performed, the personal depravity of their human medium, or by the absurdity or wickedness of the associated doctrine.

OBJECTION 6. "*Miracles may be due to hypnotism.*"

REPLY: Hypnotism is successful only in curing certain forms of nervous disease. Obviously it is inadequate as a general explanation for miracles.

OBJECTION 7. *“We do not yet know all the forces of nature. ‘Miracles’ may have been due to unknown forces which we will understand in the future.”*

REPLY: (a) While it is true that we do not know everything that natural forces can do, we certainly do know some things they can never do. We do not know the exact lifting power of a man, but we do know that no man can ever lift a ton. Natural forces alone will never restore life to a clinically dead person. Healing wounds or deformities never happens in an instant. It requires a slow and detailed process over lengths of time...unless the whole foundation of our medical knowledge is inaccurate.

REPLY: (b) Objection 6 assumes that miracle-workers had far more knowledge of natural forces than any modern scientist. From a human standpoint, Christ and the Apostles were uneducated men who lived in a time when physical science was practically unknown. To think that they had that much knowledge would be as great a miracle as any other.

REPLY: (c) Our modern world uses natural forces unknown to the ancient world (nuclear power, magnetism, etc.), but these kinds of natural forces need specially made machines. Miracle-workers often used nothing but a word or gesture.

OBJECTION 8. *“Nature’s present order - which seems to be fixed - may experience rare, interruptions. These natural interruptions might coincide with what we call ‘miracles’. So miracles can be explained away naturally.”*

REPLY: (a) Too many fully authenticated miracles have happened within the last two thousand years for them to be ‘rare interruptions of the natural order’.

REPLY: (b) Even if all the modern scientists combined their intelligence, they could never tell us exactly when and where any of these ‘rare interruptions’ might happen. Anyone supporting this objection is really saying that when miracle-workers commanded sickness to disappear, or revived the dead, they carefully picked out the precise individuals who would undergo an incalculably rare action of natural forces and timed their words of command to the very second the effects happened. That kind of knowledge in that era among those people would be a sheer miracle.

Prophecy also gives us conclusive proof of divine authority.

Prophecy is the definite prediction of events beyond the possibility of guessing or human foresight. They depend on the use of free will by God or a rational creature. Only God can know beforehand what a free person will do, along with all the particular circumstances of his actions.

Therefore a prophecy, if fulfilled, is as conclusive of divine authority as a miracle. A prophecy can originate only in God’s Omniscience, a miracle only in His Omnipotence.



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