

Langholm Academy

RMPS



**Religious and
Philosophical Questions
Miracles**

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What the SQA is looking for at National 5 level:

Divine intervention

Fixed laws of nature

Scriptural miracles

- literal and non-literal explanations

- miracles in nature

- healing miracles

- view that sees a role for religious explanations only

- view that sees a role for scientific explanations only

- view that sees a role for both religious and scientific explanations

Non-scriptural miracles

- religious and non-religious explanations

- miracles in nature

- healing miracles—

- view that sees a role for religious explanations only

- view that sees a role for scientific explanations only

- view that sees a role for both religious and scientific explanations



What the SQA is looking for at Higher level:

Are miracles real?

- “How do religious people explain miracles?

- “What evidence do religious people use to support these explanations?

- “What are the strengths and weaknesses of evidence/explanations?

- “How do non-religious people explain miracles?

- “What evidence do non-religious people use to support these explanations?

- “What are the strengths and weaknesses of evidence/explanations?

- “Can religious and non-religious views on miracles be compatible?

Attributes of God - Key words

Learn me!!!



Theism - Belief in God

Eternal - non-contingent - not caused or dependent on anything else,

unaffected by time and space

Omnipotent- all powerful - God can do anything that is logically possible

Omniscient- all knowing

Omni-benevolent - all loving, all good

Omnipresent - everywhere at all times

Personal - That God is like a person, someone with whom One can relate

Impersonal - God as an idea, a force

Immanent - Present and acting 'in the world'

Transcendent - Outside or beyond the universe

Incorporeal - Without material form / without body

Free will - free to choose without predetermination - nothing to influence the decision

Atheism - a belief that there is no God and so the world is all there is.

Agnostic - is someone who has suspended judgement about the existence of God / waiting for proof

Scripture—sacred or holy writings

Literal—Taking words at their most basic sense/ at face value

Metaphorical— To look for meaning or symbolism

Philosophical -Devoted to the study of the fundamental nature of knowledge, reality, and existence

Science—Only hamsters eat vomit - observation, hypothesis, experimentation and verification; based on empirical evidence

Reason—The capacity for consciously making sense of things, applying logic, establishing and verifying facts, and changing or justifying practices, institutions, and beliefs based on new or existing information.

Faith—Strong belief in the doctrines of a religion, based on spiritual conviction rather than proof

Divine intervention—A miracle or act of god (or gods) that causes something good to happen or stops something bad from happening.

Fixed Laws of Nature—Gravity, tides, earth revolves round the sun...

Can we define God?

God is that which nothing greater can be conceived' Anselm

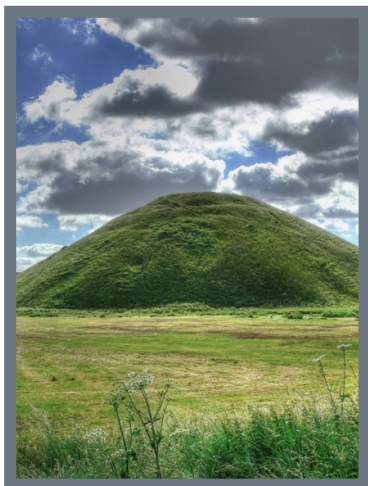
By this he meant nothing could be superior to or even equal to God, since to be equal to God would mean that god was not the greatest.

'God is a supremely perfect being' Descartes

This would make sense as it incorporates the idea of an object worthy of worship. However, the problem arises as to what attributes a perfect being would possess.

Aquinas used the illustration of a person sitting on top of a hill watching people walking below in the space/time continuum. However, the observer on top of the hill is outside of that special order yet observes all the order in one view. The observer is God.

(Cole, Philosophy of religion, 2008)

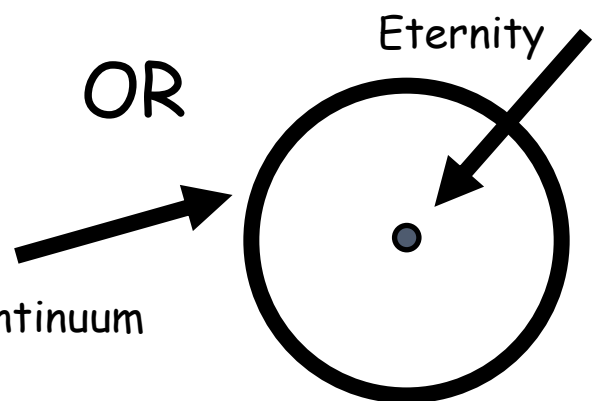


Space-time continuum

Aquinas also used the illustration of a circle where the centre point represents eternity and the circumference represents time. Aquinas also said that the author of the space-time continuum could not be bound by it.

(Cole, Philosophy of religion, 2008)

God Eternal



Swinburne (Is there a God, 1996)

"I prefer the understanding of God being eternal as His being everlasting rather than His being timeless".

Religious Experience

Key Words

- **Subjective** – having its source within the mind, emotion led.
- **Objective** – external to the mind, actually existing.
- **Mysticism** – the name given to the experience of an ultimate reality that is difficult to express using normal vocabulary.
- **Ineffable** – indescribable, cannot be described in words.
- **Noetic** – relating to the mind 'a noetic quality' insight into truths, a sense of revelation.
- **Transiency** – not permanent, last for only a short period.
- **Passivity** – not actively participating.
- **Numinous** – a feeling of "one-ness", being part of something bigger.
- **Conversion** – the changing from one set of beliefs to another.
- **Prayer** – inward communication with God.

'Religion must come from a being separate from this world. This being is totally unknowable—awesome and terrifying, yet also fascinating'.
(The idea of the Holy, 1936)

Rudolph Otto (1896-1937) and the numinous

Otto used the example of the storm which partially destroys a bridge over a river. When people came out after the storm there was an eerie silence and a feeling of awe and wonder at the power of nature.

He said that 'numinous' experiences are described using everyday words but these words don't get close to the experience, we can't 'pin it down'.

Religious Experience

Sir Alister Hardy (1896-1985)

Set up the Religious Experience Research Unit (RERU) in Oxford with the objective of examining the extent and nature of the religious experiences of people in Britain.

In 2000 the RERU was moved to Wales and renamed the Alister Hardy Research Centre in honour of his work.

Part of his work was published by David Hay (inner space, 1987) and revealed that 25-45% of the population of Britain had been aware of a presence or power beyond themselves.

Mysticism

Mysticism is present in almost all religions. Some groups actively seek mystical experience through the use of music and movement. Some religious cults have been known to use hallucinatory drugs to attain a 'higher understanding'.

An Islamic sect known for inducing a trance-like state through music and movement are Sufis or sometimes known as 'Whirling Dervishes'.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AglGJYby_pQ

Chanting and spinning, for extended periods of time encourage a 'higher state of perception' or focus and are part of Sufi worship.



In Christianity, in particular 'Charismatic' churches such as Pentecostal or Baptist, 'glossolalia' or 'speaking in tongues' is common and very much encouraged.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NZbQBajYnEc>—This clip is an investigation into the practice of glossolalia.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5BOFYmcHEIc>—This clip is an example of music and dance in a Pentecostal Church as part of religious experience.

Faith and Reason



Faith and reason are both sources of authority upon which beliefs can rest.

'All religions, arts and sciences are branches of the same tree. All these aspirations are directed toward ennobling man's life, lifting it from the sphere of mere physical existence and leading the individual towards freedom'. Albert Einstein

Reason is generally understood as the principles for a **methodological inquiry** (follows a procedure), whether intellectual, moral, aesthetic, or religious. Think of the **scientific method**, how we make **observations**, suggest a **hypothesis**, carry out an **experiment** and then **verify** our findings. (Only Hamsters Eat Vomit!)

Faith, on the other hand, involves a stance toward some claim that is not, at least presently, demonstrable by reason. Thus faith is a kind of **attitude of trust** or assent. As such, it is ordinarily understood to involve an **act of will** or a **commitment** on the part of the **believer**. Religious faith involves a belief that makes some kind of **reference to a transcendent** source (God). The basis for a person's faith usually is understood to come from the **authority of revelation**. (revealed) Revelation is either direct, through some kind of direct infusion, or indirect, usually from the testimony of an other (The Bible, dreams & visions, prayer etc).

'The way to see by faith is to shut the eye of reason'.

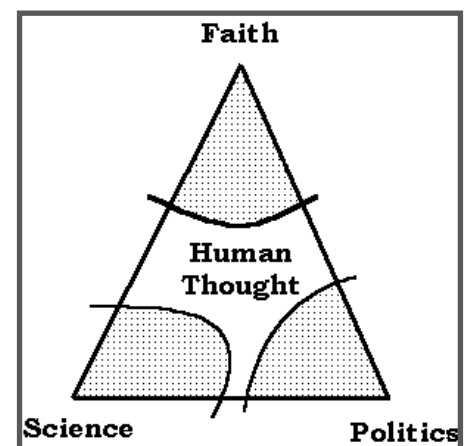
Benjamin Franklin

'Religion is a world view that affects all life, science is just one of the things affected... to speak of them separately is to fail to recognise what religion is'.

'Reason is the natural organ of truth'

'Imagination is the organ of meaning'.

CS Lewis



Philosophers



1711-1776

David Hume

Miracles are the violation of the laws of nature.

Hume outlined his criticism of miracles in his book *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*.

He had a deep respect for the power of reason. Belief, Hume asserts, should be proportioned to evidence. In those cases where all evidence points to one particular conclusion, we can be almost certain that that conclusion is correct. Hume was an empiricist. He believed all questions of truth had to be based on experience. **We have no sensory experience of God therefore we can have no knowledge of God.**

He did not quite reject the possibility of miracles as an act of God.

He challenged the use of miracles to demonstrate the truth of religions. Hume wrote about the importance of testimony. **A testimony is a claim which a person makes, believing it to be true.**

He says that no testimony is sufficient to establish a miracle, unless the testimony be of such a kind, that its falsehood would be more miraculous than the fact it endeavours to establish.

Hume argues that any reports of a miracle confronts the hearer with two possibilities:

Possibility 1) That God or some other supernatural agent performs a miracle such as turning water into wine, Jesus walking on water, a dead man raising from the dead, or the Prophet Muhammad having the precise words of the Qu'ran dictated to him by an archangel, or

Possibility 2) That the events described did not occur.

Hume says that 2) will always be more rational than 1) because:

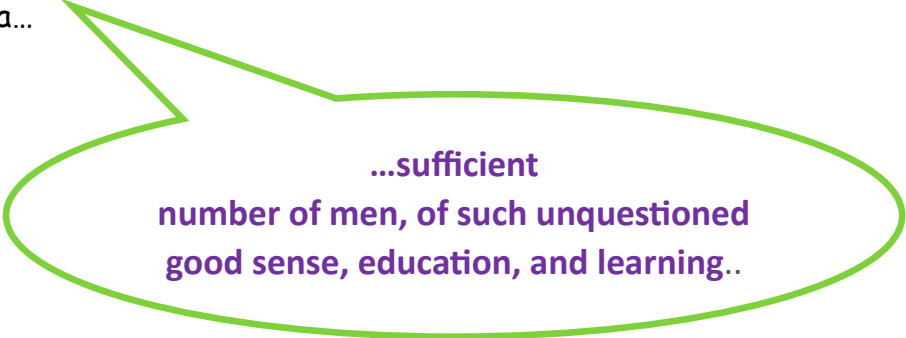
we have constant experience that natural laws hold and it is always going to be more likely that reports of the breach of a law of nature were exaggerated and never, in fact happened.

Hume considered that natural laws were fixed, but today, it is now accepted based on our knowledge of quantum theory, that what we take to be fixed natural laws are no more than approximations.

Nevertheless, Hume could argue that the likelihood of a breach of natural laws is so low that it is more likely that natural laws held and a miracle did not occur.

Philosophers

Hume also questioned whether there had ever been a sufficient number of intelligent/reliable witnesses to a miracle, and suggested that people who claimed to have seen miracles were those people who were prone to look for them. There has never been a miracle that has been witnessed by a...



...sufficient
number of men, of such unquestioned
good sense, education, and learning..

Our knowledge of miracles comes exclusively from the testimony of others who claim to have seen miracles. Since we receive this testimony secondhand from the experience of others, we should treat it as less reliable than our own experience.

Watch - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TZQhRxSMvPg>

Hume provides four reasons to think that there has never been sufficient evidence in support of a miracle to render it probable.

1. No miracle is supported by testimony of a sufficient number of trustworthy people to rule out the possibility of falsehood.
2. While we should normally believe that which most closely accords itself with past experience, the sensations of surprise and wonder often lead us to unreasonable beliefs. There are countless instances of tall tales of all sorts that stem not from reasonable inquiry but from a love of wonder (basically people get carried away).
3. Hume remarks that most reports of miraculous events occur amongst barbarous or ignorant people, who may not be sophisticated enough to disbelieve fabricated testimony.
4. Since every religion claims the veracity (truth) of its own miracles as against the miracles of every other religion, the evidence of all other religions opposes the evidence in favor of a miracle in any one particular religion. For instance, what a Muslim might consider a miracle would be considered a heresy by anyone of different faith.

Philosophers



1813-1855

Søren Kierkegaard

'Miracles require a leap of faith'

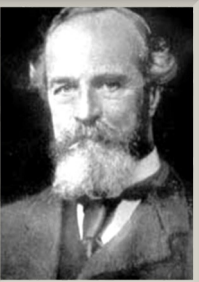
Religious faith is not a philosophical system or set of beliefs; it is held passionately.

To believe that God exists, but to treat this as just another fact, about which we feel nothing, is not to have faith. Faith isn't (just) a matter of what, but of *how*, we believe.

The commitment that characterizes faith requires a decision, a 'leap'.

This leap *requires* objective uncertainty.

Objective certainty will not have the same impact on one's life as faith in the face of uncertainty - perhaps God prevents certainty for this reason. But why leap into faith rather than reject it? For now, our question is only 'may we leap, reasonably?'



1842-1910

William James

It can be right and reasonable to believe something, without sufficient evidence for its truth, when we face a **'genuine option'** that cannot be decided on the basis of evidence.

- The alternatives for what to believe, e.g. 'God exists' and 'God does not exist', are 'live' - the person feels they really could believe either.
- The alternatives exclude each other (not more than one of them can be true) and there are no other alternatives - the choice between them is 'forced'.
- The alternatives are 'momentous' rather than trivial, e.g. this is your only opportunity to get it right or the stakes are high.



1847-1879

W K Clifford

- It is 'wrong always, everywhere, and for every one, to believe anything on insufficient evidence'.
- Forming beliefs on insufficient evidence makes us credulous, and weakens our cognitive powers.

Philosophers

Richard Swinburne



1934 -

In *The Concept of Miracle* (1974), Swinburne argues that Hume is wrong to assume that *no evidence* for a miracle is reliable enough.

He identifies four types of historical evidence for miracles:

1. Memories of our experience
2. Testimony by others about their experiences
3. Physical traces of the event, such as a medical examination of a person that has been healed. (e.g. at Lourdes)
4. Understanding of modern science and what is thought to be physically *impossible* or highly *improbable* (e.g. humans flying verses cancer disappears)

For Swinburne, the possibility of miracles relies on the principles of testimony and credulity.

The Principles of Testimony and Credulity

The Principle of Testimony: In the absence of special considerations the experiences of others are (probably) as they report them ... In general there are no special considerations for doubting what subjects report about their religious experiences. **Analysis:** He suggests that unless we know someone to be a habitual liar, mentally ill, or to be 'under the influence' of some hallucinogen, we should trust what they say. He goes on to argue that it would unreasonable to assume this for all the millions of people who have claimed such experiences. **The Principle of Credulity:** ...if it appears to a subject that X is present, then X is probably present. What one seems to perceive is probably so. **Analysis:** In response to such claims, Richard Dawkins has often quoted the astronomer and atheist Carl Sagan's famous phrase: 'extraordinary claims require extraordinary evidence'. The point being that whilst it makes sense to accept in general what people say, for example, about what they had for breakfast, or how many children they have, it is not wise to naively accept what they say if they are claiming to have run 100 metres in less than 9 seconds, or that they can make themselves disappear for a day once a year. We would rightly demand pretty sound evidence for such claims.

Philosophers

Swinburne continues his riposte against Hume by considering what is meant by a natural law. The problem for Swinburne is that Hume emphasises the fixed and universal nature of natural laws.

Swinburne agrees that natural laws are based from people's experiences of observing the world, but he emphasises two points distinct from Hume.

Laws of nature are generalisations, i.e. they communicate a general picture of how things work simply.

All natural laws are corrigible (*The Concept of Miracle*). This means it is the best description of how the world works that we currently have. A new discovery may mean that a law of nature has to be modified or changed. Hume does not consider this in his argument.

corrigible - capable of being corrected, rectified, or reformed

Swinburne defines a miracle as 'an occurrence of a non-repeatable counter instance to a law of nature'.

In other words a miracle is an event which does not fit in with our 'laws of nature' as we understand them, but equally the event on its own is not enough to prove the law of nature inaccurate. You cannot define a new law from this one instance when an event occurs which does not fit in with the law. It is a one-off. It is unrepeatable. From this he concludes:

1. It would also be illogical to say that the law of nature is wrong because of one incident.
2. It would also be wrong to doubt the occurrence of an incident simply because it breaks our 'natural laws'.

So Swinburne believes that laws of nature are good general descriptors of how the world works, but, that does not remove the possibility of a miracle (a counter-instance to a law of nature) occurring.

Hume does not say what constitutes a sufficient number (of witnesses) nor what good learning means (educated, reliable witnesses). There must logically be a point at which a predetermined number is sufficient.



Philosophers



1938 -

Keith Ward

Ward attacks Hume for setting miracles up to fail. Hume did not want to believe in miracles and felt that miracles cannot happen, that they are absurd. Hume was an empiricist and firm believer in the fixed laws of nature and felt that these were more reliable than any miracle story.

'Hume's status as an empiricist is once again used to highlight an inadequacy within his text, namely that in keeping with the definition of an empiricist Hume's philosophical outlook predisposes his rejection of the supernatural world. Therefore it is folly to talk of miracles with a supernatural originator as it is apparent that Hume by nature of his empirical stance will not be able to discuss these phenomena without bias'. (Martin Dobson and Dominic Gibben, 'David Hume and Miracles')

Keith Ward argues that Hume's definition of a miracle as 'a violation of a law of nature by a God or a spirit' is a '*totally unworkable definition*' for two reasons:

- 1) 'Laws of nature' didn't exist in people's minds before Isaac Newton. People in the ancient world and the authors of the Bible didn't think that things happened according to fixed, unbreakable laws of nature. They believed that things could happen that were out of the ordinary and they had plenty of evidence to support this. Modern Physics and quantum theory in particular, suggest that the 'laws of nature' are not absolute or unbreakable.

Keith Ward argued that modern physics *knows* that it is *impossible to prove* that something will *definitely* happen. Laws of nature are inherently *flexible*; this means that it is possible for improbable things to happen. As Ward said Physics cannot rule out miracles.'

- 2) 'Hume is using a verbal con-trick'

Hume felt that by definition, miracles cannot happen. The trouble with this is, that it is by *his* definition of a miracle that they cannot happen. Ward argues that there are other definitions of miracle.

Ward argues 'Hume is using a verbal con-trick' it is an argument used to define miracles out of existence, when reality might be different.

Philosophers

Keith Ward: Miracles do happen

Ward argues that, '*a miracle is something that doesn't obey a general law of nature.*' There is more to a miracle than breaking a law of nature, they are events that simply do not come under any law of nature.

For Ward, a miracle achieves two things:

1. It is a wonderful event (from the Latin *miraculum*).
2. It is an event that shows something about the nature of spiritual reality, of the nature of God and the purpose of God.

You can respond to a miracle in either of two ways:

1. You could respond as an atheist and argue that you can't have an event to show you the nature of God, because God does not exist. By definition, miracles cannot happen (like Hume).
2. You could see miracles as a theist, as a believer. If you believe that there is a spiritual being of supreme goodness, you will believe it is possible for that being to bring about miracles. For Ward, belief in God is based upon having a miraculous experience yourself, or if you know someone who has had a miraculous experience and you trust their testimony.

Ward says we have to accept that things happen for which we do not have a total explanation. 95% of the universe is thought to comprise dark matter or anti-matter and we don't know how this works. The universe is largely inexplicable. We know that the universe is law like for most of the time, but modern physics accepts that those laws are not entirely predictable. This is similar to an argument used by Anthony Flew, who says that miracles are events that cannot be explained: we must invest in science to try to discover an explanation.

If you are a believer, you would expect that there are some events in the universe that are caused by God, and belief in miracles is in keeping with this personal explanation of them. For the believer, it is reasonable to believe in miracles as probabilistic laws allow improbable events to happen.

Faith and Reason

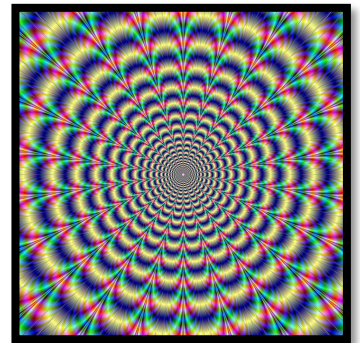
Scientific explanations

By 'scientific' we mean that which is based on research, evidence, and interpretation of evidence.

Scriptural miracles cannot be tested since they happened in the past, so we need to take a more theoretical approach. We can consider possible physical explanations and possible psychological explanations.

Possible physical explanations

- Physical causes can be linked to a range of things including dementia; infections/viruses; trauma; accidents; stress; genetic/environmental factors; temporal lobe epilepsy.
- Intentional - entering an altered state of consciousness. This could include taking drugs or alcohol which have a range of neurological effects, repetitive movements, chanting/singing or prayer and meditation.
- Oxygen deprivation—can lead to an altered state of consciousness. This could happen as a result of injury or trauma, low air pressure at high altitudes.
- Some miraculous events may have a physical cause for example the statue of the popular Saint Padre Pio of Pietrelcina in Messina, Sicily, was found to have tears of blood one day in 2002, Church officials quickly ordered tests that showed the blood belonged to a woman and then dismissed the case as a hoax.
- Scientific investigations such as the 'God Helmet' created by Michael Persinger have shown that stimulation of areas of the temporally lobe in the brain can bring on what is then described as a religious experience.



(Walker, J. Religious & Philosophical Questions, 2016)

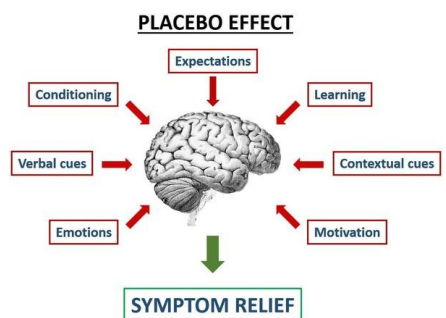


Faith and Reason

Possible psychological explanations

Scientific explanations

- **The power of expectation**—Some believe that the power of expectation can make you more suggestible and therefore more likely to experience or interpret something as a miracle. In some religious traditions, miracles are expected as a part of worship and part of religious life. The 'gifts or the spirit' are proof and truth of your faith. 'Glossolalia' or the Toronto Blessing could be examples of this.
- **Placebo effect**— This is used in research and drugs testing. Two groups are given pills and then observed to see what happens. One group is given the medication and the other group is given the same pill but with no active ingredient, this is the placebo. It is regularly found that those who have taken the placebo claim to actually experience some effects. In relation to miracles, it is possible that people expect to have an experience and that expectation leads them to some unknown set of processes which results in them experiencing something miraculous.
- **Inattention blindness**—A very curious psychological phenomenon where people literally do not see what is in front of them. We might focus on the detail and miss the 'big picture'. We might see what we want to and not what is really there.
- **Witness reliability**—Witness testimony can be very insecure. There are a range of factors in memory retrieval and psychologists have shown that memories can be 'planted' to cause them to believe something happened when it didn't.
- **Psychological priming**— 'priming' or 'preparing' can be the result of upbringing, culture, or created circumstances. Consider when you watch a scary film, are you more likely to interpret the noise from the hall as scary too? If we are primed to believe we might experience a miracle, we are more likely to interpret an event as such.
- **Emotional and social factors**—Many miraculous events happen when people are not in their usual state of mind. Influence from those around you can be significant. If the person next to you sees a miracle, but you don't you might dismiss the claim, but if a hundred people around you make the same claim you might be inclined to go along with them,
- **Charismatic leaders**—Strong leadership and influence can lead people to believe they are experiencing a miracle.
- **Tricksters and charlatans**— There are some who fake miracles to make money out of vulnerable people.



Faith and Reason

Scientific materialists believe...

Observation, Hypotheses, Experiment, Verification.

Science makes its claims on the evidence that can be found. It is really only interested in things that can be shown to be true or false (Verifiable or falsifiable). This hypothesis might also come with time limits, its known as a provisional truth as some new evidence might only be around the next corner.

There are times when science has to do some guess work, this is known as an **assumption**. If evidence is missing it does the best it can with the evidence available, but these findings are classed as theories or hypotheses waiting to be shown as true or false.

Scientific materialists think that the scientific method goes beyond simple beliefs. It is a rigorous approach that uses real evidence and the findings are always open to challenge and change when new evidence comes along.

What Scientific Materialist think about religious people

A scientific materialist would most likely argue that a religious person is deluded. The main purpose of religion is to act as a barrier standing in the way of human progression, some might even go as far as to compare it to an illness that needs cured!

There are some scientific materialists who aren't as damning when it comes to religion. They think that religion, while still being made up is relatively harmless. A God is no more dangerous than that imaginary friend you used to have when you were 5 years old. You know the one who 'told' you to write on the walls with the crayons.!

There are problems with the historicity and accuracy of the Bible!

The problem of Evil & Suffering—whilst there is great beauty, love and kindness in the world, there is also horrific suffering, both natural and man-made. God cannot be an Omni-benevolent God if he allows these things to exist, or he is not Omnipotent if he cannot stop them.

There is a big debate surrounding what we know as 'religious experience'. How do people know that they have had an encounter with the almighty, it can be a rather personal thing, like why did God visit you and not me. Many would argue that it isn't much more than a hallucination, being tired or stressed etc. What's more these experiences as with so much concerning religion is often not open to scientific enquiry!

Neurotheology

Neurotheology is a relatively new area of study that investigates brain activity and religious experience. Andrew Newberg of the University of Pennsylvania has been studying how different parts of the brain respond during religious experience. Michael Persinger, professor of psychology created the 'God Helmet' a device that uses an electromagnetic field to induce religious experience.

Faith and Reason

Religious Literalist/Fundamentalists believe...

Not all religious literalists disagree with science,. Some may accept that some of the developments of science are positive and in line with their faith. **At the most extreme end of the spectrum would be a Christian literalist who rejected everything that science says.**

The more **extreme Christian literalists** would go as far as to say science is from the **Devil** - it's a trick that promotes humans and encourages the believer to reject God. **This type of Christian literalist might argue that scientific development goes against the will of God others argue God is placing it there as some sort of test or experiment (how ironic) to see just how strong your faith is!**

- The bible is God's word, true in every aspect, it just needs accepted.
- Big Bang and evolution is not in the Bible therefore these things did not happen (Bible is without error). The God made the universe and human life exactly as it says in the Bible .
- Big Bang and Evolution are only theories and these theories (Big Bang and Evolution) are the current accepted theories, science is blind to other possibilities.
- Science is wrong- they have misread the evidence (science has been wrong in the past).
- Some see science as a trick from the devil or as a test of faith.
- God is omnipotent, he has the power to create the universe instantly and make humans as he did Adam and Eve.
- The universe is too complex to have emerged out of a Big Bang and Human beings are too complex to have evolved, we require a creator/designer.

What Fundamentalist think of scientists

In a nutshell, literalists argue that scientific enquiry as a method of developing human understanding is so full of flaws, theoretical and practical, that it must be rejected. Besides which, using the techniques of religious method is more than enough to help humans make sense of the world around them and our place in it.

Faith and Reason

Liberal Christians think...

Scientific theories are the most likely explanation of origins.

- *Big Bang and Evolution is supported by observations (evidence scientists have seen).*
- *The Genesis story should not be taken literally - it is a myth or symbolic.*
- *The Bible was written by humans who were trying to provide an explanation for their beliefs in God.*
- *Genesis tells us that God was behind the creation of the universe and science tells us how He did it.*
- *The origin of the big bang still remains and liberal Christians believe God started it, he also began the process of human life and evolution is his mechanism for this.*

Compatibility

<https://www.debate.org/opinions/are-religion-and-science-compatible>

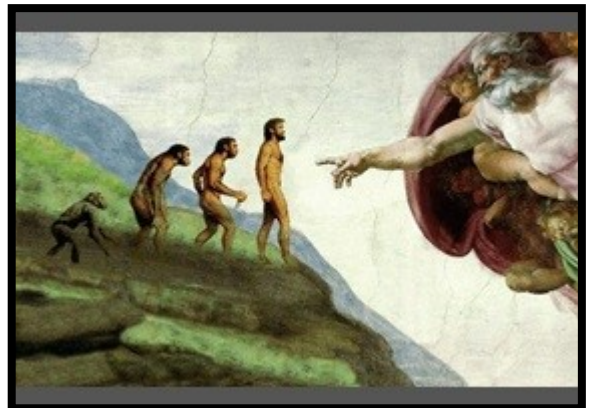
Is it possible for religion and science to live side by side?

Many Scientists are Christians and some scientists, whilst not having a faith themselves wouldn't think less of someone's view just because they believe in God.

Many religious people can accept reason and scientific methods alongside their religious beliefs, they feel they do not contradict each other. For some, the answer is no, but for others their own interpretation of their own 'method' leads them to the conclusion that it is quite acceptable to have religious beliefs while explaining the Universe through scientific means.

How can you believe in both?

- **Believing in God and believing in the methods and findings of science do not need to be contradictions as they are just different ways of understanding**
- **Belief in God involves faith as opposed to scientific evidence (perhaps even in the face of scientific evidence).**
- **Religion does not need to be tested, just accepted. This is not just 'blind faith', but faith which is supported by reasonable argument and the teachings of the faith you follow however they have been received.**
- **-Religious people believe that 'religious method' helps them to understand and answer 'religious questions'. Scientific method helps them to understand 'scientific questions', therefore there's no tension between the two.**



Interpreting miracles

Literal	Metaphorical
Word of God	Human words
Written by God	Written by people
Historically accurate	Theologically accurate
Inerrant	Open to interpretation
Literally true	Metaphorically true

Inerrant— Incapable of being wrong

Theologically—study of the nature of God and religious belief

Metaphorically—explaining an idea or making a comparison

For each miracle we study, you need to be able to consider how **Fundamentalists** (Christians who take the bible literally), **Liberals** (who look at the bible metaphorically) and **Scientific materialists** would respond to the miracle. You will also need make reference to **philosophers** who have commented on the occurrence of miracles in support of your points.

At N5 you need to understand what is meant by 'healing' and 'nature' miracles. Next to each of the following examples of miracles you will find one or both of these to help you.



Scriptural miracles—Old Testament

Genesis 19:23-26



Lot's wife is turned into a pillar of salt.

²³ The sun was rising when Lot reached Zoar. ²⁴ Suddenly the LORD rained burning sulphur on the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah ²⁵ and destroyed them and the whole valley, along with all the people there and everything that grew on the land. ²⁶ But Lot's wife looked back and was turned into a pillar of salt.

Analysis

Punished for disobedience

Natural phenomenon - meteor shower

Witness testimony



Scientific thoughts

Geologists think nature may have helped inspire the story.

There are multiple scientific theories to explain the events in the Bible. One possibility is that an earthquake in the seismically active Dead Sea region destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah. In a variation of this idea, climate change may have brought a drought to the area described as once-fertile but barren after God's destruction — and an earthquake was the final blow that ruined an already crippled society. Another explanation is that an earthquake caused a flood that wiped out the cities. One problem with all of these ideas is that they do not entirely account for the Bible's description of fire and brimstone.

<https://www.earthmagazine.org/article/destruction-sodom-and-gomorrah-earthquakes-or-volcanoes>

Metaphorical interpretation

A story about punishment. Firstly for the townspeople for immoral behaviour and secondly for Lot's wife who disobeyed the instruction to not look back. God is both omni-benevolent to those who obey and worship Him and omnipotent in his actions.

Scriptural miracles—Old Testament

Exodus 3 - 4:11



God speaks to Moses (Burning bush)

³ One day while Moses was taking care of the sheep and goats of his father-in-law Jethro, the priest of Midian, he led the flock across the desert and came to Sinai, the holy mountain. ² There the angel of the LORD appeared to him as a flame coming from the middle of a bush. Moses saw that the bush was on fire but that it was not burning up. ³ "This is strange," he thought. "Why isn't the bush burning up? I will go closer and see."

⁴ When the LORD saw that Moses was coming closer, he called to him from the middle of the bush and said, "Moses! Moses!"

He answered, "Yes, here I am."

⁵ God said, "Do not come any closer. Take off your sandals, because you are standing on holy ground. ⁶ I am the God of your ancestors, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob." So Moses covered his face, because he was afraid to look at God.

⁷ Then the LORD said, "I have seen how cruelly my people are being treated in Egypt; I have heard them cry out to be rescued from their slave drivers. I know all about their sufferings, ⁸ and so I have come down to rescue them from the Egyptians and to bring them out of Egypt to a spacious land, one which is rich and fertile ... ⁹ I have indeed heard the cry of my people, and I see how the Egyptians are oppressing them. ¹⁰ Now I am sending you to the king of Egypt so that you can lead my people out of his country."

¹¹ But Moses said to God, "I am nobody. How can I go to the king and bring the Israelites out of Egypt?"

¹² God answered, "I will be with you, and when you bring the people out of Egypt, you will worship me on this mountain. That will be the proof that I have sent you."

¹³ But Moses replied, "When I go to the Israelites and say to them, 'The God of your ancestors sent me to you,' they will ask me, 'What is his name?' So what can I tell them?"

¹⁴ God said, "I am who I am. You must tell them: 'The one who is called I AM^[a] has sent me to you.' ¹⁵ Tell the Israelites that I, the LORD, the God of their ancestors, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, have sent you to them. This is my name forever; this is what all future generations are to call me. ¹⁶ Go and gather the leaders of Israel together and tell them that I, the LORD, the God of their ancestors, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, appeared to you. Tell them that I have come to them and have seen what the Egyptians are doing to them. ¹⁷ I have decided that I will bring them out of Egypt, where they are being treated cruelly, and will take them to a rich and fertile land...

Scriptural miracles—Old Testament

Exodus 3 - 4:11

God speaks to Moses (Burning bush) Continued

¹⁸ "My people will listen to what you say to them. Then you must go with the leaders of Israel to the king of Egypt and say to him, 'The LORD, the God of the Hebrews, has revealed himself to us. Now allow us to travel three days into the desert to offer sacrifices to the LORD, our God.' ¹⁹ I know that the king of Egypt will not let you go unless he is forced to do so. ²⁰ But I will use my power and will punish Egypt by doing terrifying things there. After that he will let you go.

²¹ "I will make the Egyptians respect you so that when my people leave, they will not go empty-handed. ²² Every Israelite woman will go to her Egyptian neighbors and to any Egyptian woman living in her house and will ask for clothing and for gold and silver jewelry. The Israelites will put these things on their sons and daughters and carry away the wealth of the Egyptians."

4 Then Moses answered the LORD, "But suppose the Israelites do not believe me and will not listen to what I say. What shall I do if they say that you did not appear to me?"

² So the LORD asked him, "What are you holding?"

"A walking stick," he answered.

³ The LORD said, "Throw it on the ground." When Moses threw it down, it turned into a snake, and he ran away from it. ⁴ Then the LORD said to Moses, "Reach down and pick it up by the tail." So Moses reached down and caught it, and it became a walking stick again. ⁵ The LORD said, "Do this to prove to the Israelites that the LORD, the God of their ancestors, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, has appeared to you."

⁶ The LORD spoke to Moses again, "Put your hand inside your robe." Moses obeyed; and when he took his hand out, it was diseased, covered with white spots, like snow. ⁷ Then the LORD said, "Put your hand inside your robe again." He did so, and when he took it out this time, it was healthy, just like the rest of his body. ⁸ The LORD said, "If they will not believe you or be convinced by the first miracle, then this one will convince them. ⁹ If in spite of these two miracles they still will not believe you, and if they refuse to listen to what you say, take some water from the Nile and pour it on the ground. The water will turn into blood."

¹⁰ But Moses said, "No, LORD, don't send me. I have never been a good speaker, and I haven't become one since you began to speak to me. I am a poor speaker, slow and hesitant."

Scriptural miracles—Old Testament

Exodus 3 - 4:11

God speaks to Moses (Burning bush) Continued

¹¹ The LORD said to him, "Who gives man his mouth? Who makes him deaf or dumb? Who gives him sight or makes him blind? It is I, the LORD. ¹² Now, go! I will help you to speak, and I will tell you what to say."

Metaphorical interpretations

A story about faith and obedience and God's chosen people.

God's miraculous energy, sacred light, illumination and the burning heart of purity, love and clarity to both Jews and Christians. It also represents Moses' reverence and fear before the divine presence.



Analysis

Dehydration—hallucination

Oxygen deprivation

Neurological pathways & conditions

Scriptural miracles—Old Testament

Exodus 14:10-31

Moses parts the Red Sea



¹⁰ When the Israelites saw the king and his army marching against them, they were terrified and cried out to the LORD for help. ¹¹ They said to Moses, "Weren't there any graves in Egypt? Did you have to bring us out here in the desert to die? Look what you have done by bringing us out of Egypt! ¹² Didn't we tell you before we left that this would happen? We told you to leave us alone and let us go on being slaves of the Egyptians. It would be better to be slaves there than to die here in the desert."



¹³ Moses answered, "Don't be afraid! Stand your ground, and you will see what the LORD will do to save you today; you will never see these Egyptians again. ¹⁴ The LORD will fight for you, and all you have to do is keep still."

¹⁵ The LORD said to Moses, "Why are you crying out for help? Tell the people to move forward. ¹⁶ Lift up your walking stick and hold it out over the sea. The water will divide, and the Israelites will be able to walk through the sea on dry ground. ¹⁷ I will make the Egyptians so stubborn that they will go in after them, and I will gain honor by my victory over the king, his army, his chariots, and his drivers. ¹⁸ When I defeat them, the Egyptians will know that I am the LORD."

¹⁹ The angel of God, who had been in front of the army of Israel, moved and went to the rear. The pillar of cloud also moved until it was ²⁰ between the Egyptians and the Israelites. The cloud made it dark for the Egyptians, but gave light to the people of Israel,^[b] and so the armies could not come near each other all night.

²¹ Moses held out his hand over the sea, and the LORD drove the sea back with a strong east wind. It blew all night and turned the sea into dry land. The water was divided, ²² and the Israelites went through the sea on dry ground, with walls of water on both sides. ²³ The Egyptians pursued them and went after them into the sea with all their horses, chariots, and drivers. ²⁴ Just before dawn the LORD looked down from the pillar of fire and cloud at the Egyptian army and threw them into a panic. ²⁵ He made the wheels of their chariots get stuck, so that they moved with great difficulty. The Egyptians said, "The LORD is fighting for the Israelites against us. Let's get out of here!"

Scriptural miracles—Old Testament

Exodus 14:10-31

Moses parts the Red Sea continued

²⁶ The LORD said to Moses, "Hold out your hand over the sea, and the water will come back over the Egyptians and their chariots and drivers." ²⁷ So Moses held out his hand over the sea, and at day-break the water returned to its normal level. The Egyptians tried to escape from the water, but the LORD threw them into the sea. ²⁸ The water returned and covered the chariots, the drivers, and all the Egyptian army that had followed the Israelites into the sea; not one of them was left. ²⁹ But the Israelites walked through the sea on dry ground, with walls of water on both sides.

³⁰ On that day the LORD saved the people of Israel from the Egyptians, and the Israelites saw them lying dead on the seashore. ³¹ When the Israelites saw the great power with which the LORD had defeated the Egyptians, they stood in awe of the LORD; and they had faith in the LORD and in his servant Moses.

Metaphorical explanations

Physical saving from physical slavery

Demonstration of Gods omnipotence and omnibenevolence.

Shows that those who have faith in God will be saved and be part of a special community.

Those who disobey God or seek to mistreat his devotees, will be punished.

Analysis

Witness reliability

Psychological priming

Power of expectation

Emotional and social factors

Charismatic Leader

Scriptural miracles—Old Testament

Exodus 14:10-31

Moses parts the Red Sea continued

Scientific explanation

Researchers at the National Centre for Atmospheric Research (NCAR) and the University of Colorado at Boulder (CU) claim to have used computer modelling to reconstruct the various wind and wave combinations that could have produced the dry land bridge described in Exodus.

Just forget about the Red Sea. Their conclusion relocates the scene of the Israelites escape to the Nile delta.

The researchers determined that a strong east wind, blowing overnight, could have driven back the waters on a coastal lagoon in northern Egypt long enough for the Israelites to walk across the exposed mud flats before the waters rushed back in, engulfing the Pharaoh's cavalry.

"The simulations match fairly closely with the account in Exodus," Carl Drews, the study's lead author, said in a statement. "The parting of the waters can be understood through fluid dynamics. The wind moves the water in a way that's in accordance with physical laws, creating a safe passage with water on two sides and then abruptly allowing the water to rush back in."

Drews, who spent years studying the story of the crossing, relied on research by earlier scholars on the ancient geography of the area to reconstruct the likely locations and depths of various Nile delta waterways.

He used computer simulations to try to re-create the conditions that might have swept away the waters to expose dry land.

He ruled out the Red Sea as a location because it runs from north to south which does not readily fit the description in Exodus of an east wind sweeping the waters to one side.

He eventually concluded that steady 63mph winds from the east over a digitally reconstructed lake along the Mediterranean near today's Port Said could have swept the waters back to the western shores exposing wide mud flats and creating a land bridge that would remain high and dry for four hours.

<https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2010/sep/21/moses-red-sea-exodus>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uA8PaxEces4>

Scriptural miracles—New Testament

John 9:1-20

Jesus heals a man born blind



As Jesus was walking along, he saw a man who had been born blind. ² His disciples asked him, "Teacher, whose sin caused him to be born blind? Was it his own or his parents' sin?"

³ Jesus answered, "His blindness has nothing to do with his sins or his parents' sins. He is blind so that God's power might be seen at work in him. ⁴ As long as it is day, we must do the work of him who sent me; night is coming when no one can work. ⁵ While I am in the world, I am the light for the world."

⁶ After he said this, Jesus spat on the ground and made some mud with the spittle; he rubbed the mud on the man's eyes ⁷ and told him, "Go and wash your face in the Pool of Siloam." (This name means "Sent.") So the man went, washed his face, and came back seeing.

⁸ His neighbours, then, and the people who had seen him begging before this, asked, "Isn't this the man who used to sit and beg?"

⁹ Some said, "He is the one," but others said, "No he isn't; he just looks like him."

So the man himself said, "I am the man."

¹⁰ "How is it that you can now see?" they asked him.

¹¹ He answered, "The man called Jesus made some mud, rubbed it on my eyes, and told me to go to Siloam and wash my face. So I went, and as soon as I washed, I could see."

¹² "Where is he?" they asked.

"I don't know," he answered.

¹³ Then they took to the Pharisees the man who had been blind. ¹⁴ The day that Jesus made the mud and cured him of his blindness was a Sabbath. ¹⁵ The Pharisees, then, asked the man again how he had received his sight. He told them, "He put some mud on my eyes; I washed my face, and now I can see."

¹⁶ Some of the Pharisees said, "The man who did this cannot be from God, for he does not obey the Sabbath law."

Scriptural miracles—New Testament

Others, however, said, "How could a man who is a sinner perform such miracles as these?" And there was a division among them.

¹⁷ So the Pharisees asked the man once more, "You say he cured you of your blindness—well, what do you say about him?"

"He is a prophet," the man answered.

¹⁸ The Jewish authorities, however, were not willing to believe that he had been blind and could now see, until they called his parents ¹⁹ and asked them, "Is this your son? You say that he was born blind; how is it, then, that he can now see?"

²⁰ His parents answered, "We know that he is our son, and we know that he was born blind.

Metaphorical explanations

This can be interpreted not that Jesus physically healed the man, but that he healed him spiritually. That he brought him out of the darkness, blind to God and made him 'see the light'.

Jesus notices the least in society rather than the strongest, most powerful or wealthy.

Weaknesses lead to God

Analysis

Witness reliability

Psychological priming

Power of expectation

Emotional and social factors

Charismatic Leader



Scriptural miracles—New Testament

Mark 5

Evil spirits



⁵ Jesus and his disciples arrived on the other side of Lake Galilee, in the territory of Gerasa. ² As soon as Jesus got out of the boat, he was met by a man who came out of the burial caves there. This man had an evil spirit in him ³ and lived among the tombs. Nobody could keep him tied with chains any more; ⁴ many times his feet and his hands had been tied, but every time he broke the chains and smashed the irons on his feet. He was too strong for anyone to control him. ⁵ Day and night he wandered among the tombs and through the hills, screaming and cutting himself with stones.

⁶ He was some distance away when he saw Jesus; so he ran, fell on his knees before him, ⁷ and screamed in a loud voice, "Jesus, Son of the Most High God! What do you want with me? For God's sake, I beg you, don't punish me!" (⁸ He said this because Jesus was saying, "Evil spirit, come out of this man!")

⁹ So Jesus asked him, "What is your name?"

The man answered, "My name is 'Mob'—there are so many of us!" ¹⁰ And he kept begging Jesus not to send the evil spirits out of that region.

¹¹ There was a large herd of pigs near by, feeding on a hillside. ¹² So the spirits begged Jesus, "Send us to the pigs, and let us go into them." ¹³ He let them go, and the evil spirits went out of the man and entered the pigs. The whole herd—about two thousand pigs in all—rushed down the side of the cliff into the lake and was drowned.

¹⁴ The men who had been taking care of the pigs ran away and spread the news in the town and among the farms. People went out to see what had happened, ¹⁵ and when they came to Jesus, they saw the man who used to have the mob of demons in him. He was sitting there, clothed and in his right mind; and they were all afraid. ¹⁶ Those who had seen it told the people what had happened to the man with the demons, and about the pigs.

¹⁷ So they asked Jesus to leave their territory.

¹⁸ As Jesus was getting into the boat, the man who had had the demons begged him, "Let me go with you!"

¹⁹ But Jesus would not let him. Instead, he told him, "Go back home to your family and tell them how much the Lord has done for you and how kind he has been to you."

Analysis

Witness reliability

Power of expectation

Charismatic Leader

Mental Health issues

Treatment by townsfolk -

Treatment by Jesus +

Scriptural miracles—New Testament

²⁰ So the man left and went all through the Ten Towns, telling what Jesus had done for him. And all who heard it were amazed.

Metaphorical explanations

Some Christians today see these miracles as an example of how they need to take care of the whole person - not just their physical health but also their mental health - so that people can live happy and peaceful lives.

Matthew 14:13-21 Jesus feeds the 5000



¹³ When Jesus heard the news about John, he left there in a boat and went to a lonely place by himself. The people heard about it, and so they left their towns and followed him by land. ¹⁴ Jesus got out of the boat, and when he saw the large crowd, his heart was filled with pity for them, and he healed their sick.



¹⁵ That evening his disciples came to him and said, "It is already very late, and this is a lonely place. Send the people away and let them go to the villages to buy food for themselves."

¹⁶ "They don't have to leave," answered Jesus. "You yourselves give them something to eat!"

¹⁷ "All we have here are five loaves and two fish," they replied.

¹⁸ "Then bring them here to me," Jesus said. ¹⁹ He ordered the people to sit down on the grass; then he took the five loaves and the two fish, looked up to heaven, and gave thanks to God. He broke the loaves and gave them to the disciples, and the disciples gave them to the people. ²⁰ Everyone ate and had enough. Then the disciples took up twelve baskets full of what was left over. ²¹ The number of men who ate was about five thousand, not counting the women and children.

Metaphorical explanations

The story tells us to be compassionate for the needy, and to provide them with the sustenance of **God**.

Analysis

Witness reliability

Power of expectation

Charismatic Leader

Inattention blindness

Emotional & social factors

Scriptural miracles—New Testament

Mark 16 The Resurrection

(See also Matthew 28, Luke 24 & John 11.17)



16 After the Sabbath was over, Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome bought spices to go and anoint the body of Jesus. ² Very early on Sunday morning, at sunrise, they went to the tomb. ³⁻⁴ On the way they said to one another, "Who will roll away the stone for us from the entrance to the tomb?" (It was a very large stone.) Then they looked up and saw that the stone had already been rolled back. ⁵ So they entered the tomb, where they saw a young man sitting at the right, wearing a white robe—and they were alarmed.

⁶ "Don't be alarmed," he said. "I know you are looking for Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He is not here—he has been raised! Look, here is the place where he was placed. ⁷ Now go and give this message to his disciples, including Peter: 'He is going to Galilee ahead of you; there you will see him, just as he told you.'"

⁸ So they went out and ran from the tomb, distressed and terrified. They said nothing to anyone, because they were afraid.

⁹ After Jesus rose from death early on Sunday, he appeared first to Mary Magdalene, from whom he had driven out seven demons. ¹⁰ She went and told his companions. They were mourning and crying; ¹¹ and when they heard her say that Jesus was alive and that she had seen him, they did not believe her.

Analysis

Witness reliability

Emotional factors

Grief

Metaphorical explanations

With resurrection as a metaphor, **we choose to live as if life has an eternal and objective**

meaning, even though we know, at a rational level, that everything must end. It means choosing to put the past behind us and live toward a new future in which the mistakes and losses of the past could be replaced by better choices and new opportunities.



<https://catholicstudiesacademy.com/is-the-resurrection-of-jesus-christ-a-metaphor/#:~:text=With%20resurrection%20as%20a%20metaphor%2C%20we%20choose%20to,be%20replaced%20by%20better%20choices%20and%20new%20opportunities.>

Non-Scriptural miracles

St Theresa of Avila

Canonized 1622

Feast day October 15

Teresa's father was rigidly honest and pious, but he may have carried his strictness to extremes. Teresa's mother loved romance novels but because her husband objected to these fanciful books, she hid the books from him. This put Teresa in the middle -- especially since she liked the romances too. Her father told her never to lie but her mother told her not to tell her father. Later she said she was always afraid that no matter what she did she was going to do everything wrong.

As a teenager, she cared only about boys, clothes, flirting, and rebelling. When she was 16, her father decided she was

out of control and sent her to a convent. At first she hated it but eventually she began to enjoy it -- partly because of her growing love for God, and partly because the convent was a lot less strict than her father.

Still, when the time came for her to choose between marriage and religious life, she had a tough time making the decision. She'd watched a difficult marriage ruin her mother. On the other hand being a nun didn't seem like much fun. When she finally chose religious life, she did so because **she thought that it was the only safe place for someone as prone to sin as she was.**

Once installed at the Carmelite convent permanently, she started to learn and practice mental prayer, in which she "tried as hard as I could to keep Jesus Christ present within me....My imagination is so dull that I had no talent for imagining or coming up with great theological thoughts." Teresa prayed this way off and on for eighteen years without feeling that she was getting results. Part of the reason for her trouble was that the convent was not the safe place she assumed it would be.

Many women who had no place else to go wound up at the convent, whether they had religious vocations or not. They were encouraged to stay away from the convents for long period of time to cut down on expenses. Nuns would arrange their veils attractively and wear jewellery. Prestige depended not on piety but on money. There was a steady stream of visitors in the parlour and parties that included young men. What spiritual life there was involved hysteria, weeping, exaggerated penance, nosebleeds, and self-induced visions.



1515- 1582

Non-Scriptural miracles

St Theresa of Avila

Teresa suffered the same problem that Francis

of Assisi did -- she was too charming. Everyone liked her and she liked to be liked. She found it too easy to slip into a worldly life and ignore God. The convent encouraged her to have visitors to whom she would teach mental prayer because their gifts helped the community economy. But Teresa got more involved in flattery, vanity and gossip than spiritual guidance. These weren't great sins perhaps but they kept her from God.

Then Teresa fell ill with malaria. When she had a seizure, people were so sure she was dead that after she woke up four days later she learned they had dug a grave for her. Afterwards she was paralyzed for three years and was never completely well. Yet instead of helping her spiritually, her sickness became an excuse to stop her prayer completely: she couldn't be alone enough, she wasn't healthy enough, and so forth. Later she would say, "Prayer is an act of love, words are not needed. Even if sickness distracts from thoughts, all that is needed is the will to love."

For years she hardly prayed at all "under the guise of humility." She thought as a wicked sinner she didn't deserve to get favours from God. But turning away from prayer was like "a baby turning from its mother's breasts, what can be expected but death?"

When she was 41, a priest convinced her to go back to her prayer, but she still found it difficult. "I was more anxious for the hour of prayer to be over than I was to remain there. I don't know what heavy penance I would not have gladly undertaken rather than practice prayer." She was distracted often: "This intellect is so wild that it doesn't seem to be anything else than a frantic madman no one can tie down." Teresa sympathizes with those who have a difficult time in prayer: "All the trials we endure cannot be compared to these interior battles."

As she started to pray again, God gave her spiritual delights: the prayer of quiet where God's presence overwhelmed her senses, **raptures** where God overcame her with glorious foolishness, **prayer of union** where she felt the sun of God melt her soul away. Sometimes her **whole body was raised from the ground**. If she felt God was going to levitate her body, she stretched out on the floor and called the nuns to sit on her and hold her down. Far from being excited about these events, she "begged God very much not to give me any more favours in public."

https://www.catholic.org/saints/saint.php?saint_id=208

Non-Scriptural miracles

St Theresa of Avila



"I saw an angel beside me toward the left side, in bodily form. He was not very large, but small, very beautiful, his face so blazing with light that he seemed to be one of the very highest angels, who appear all on fire. They must be those they call Cherubim...I saw in his hands a long dart of gold, and at the end of the iron there seemed to me to be a little fire. This I thought he thrust through my heart several times, and that it reached my very entrails. As he withdrew it, I thought it brought them with it, and left me all burning with a great love of God. So great was the pain, that it made me give those moans; and so utter the sweetness that this sharpest of pains gave me, that there was no wanting it to stop, nor is there any contenting of the soul with less than God".

(The Life of Teresa of Jesus, Ch19, autobiography)

Analysis

Witness reliability

Emotional factors

Power of expectation

Psychological priming



Humans experience a type of ecstasy during orgasm.

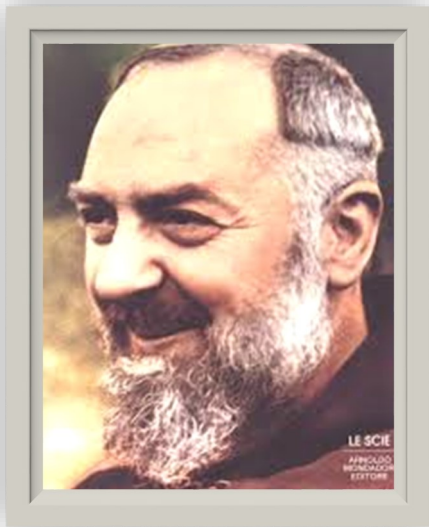
Ecstasy: Derived from the Greek ecstasis, or, to "cultivate a magical, sensuous communion with deity" For those who are sceptical about the relationship between orgasm and ecstasy, just look at **St. Teresa de Avila's** expression in the famous sculpture by **Bernini**.

<https://www.francesfox.com/enecstasy-orgasm/>

Do you think this could be a good analysis of St Theresa's experience?

Non-Scriptural miracles

Padre Pio



Venerated—(regarded with great respect) in the Roman Catholic Church

Beautified in 1999 - (Beautification - recognition by the Catholic Church of a dead person's entrance into Heaven and capacity to intercede (speak to God on behalf of individuals who pray in his or her name)

Canonised 2002 (officially declared a Saint)
Patron of Civil Defence volunteers and adolescents

1877-1968

Pio was born into a peasant (uneducated) farming family who were deeply religious. By the age of 5 he had decided he would devote his whole life to God. He began taking on penances (confession/reconciliation) and was said to have been told of on one occasion by his mother for using a stone as a pillow and sleeping on the stone floor. Pio was a sickly child who suffered one illness after another. He would experience 'heavenly visions and ecstasies'. At the age of 15 he became a novice monk taking vows of poverty, chastity and obedience.

• On September 20, 1918, while hearing confessions, Padre Pio had his first occurrence of the **stigmata**: bodily marks, pain, and bleeding in locations corresponding to the **crucifixion wounds** of Jesus Christ. This continued for fifty years, until the end of his life. The blood flowing from the stigmata **smelled of perfume or flowers**, a phenomenon mentioned in stories of the lives of several saints and often referred to as the **odour of sanctity**.



Non-Scriptural miracles

Padre Pio

Miracle or Fraud?

- Padre Pio's stigmata were studied by a number of doctors.
- His wounds never became infected, healed once but reappeared.
- It was commented on the unusually smooth edges of the wounds and lack of oedema.
- X-rays were taken of Padre Pio's hands in 1954 but no abnormality in the bone structure was found.
- He was said to be embarrassed by this condition and he often wore mittens
- It was said that he lost a cup of blood every day from the wounds
- At the time of Padre Pio's death, his body appeared unwounded, with no sign of scarring. There was a report that doctors who examined his body found it empty of all blood.

After the horrors of WW1 many people saw Padre Pio as a symbol of hope. Those close to him attest that he began to manifest several spiritual gifts, including the gifts of; **healing, bilocation, levitation, prophecy, miracles, extraordinary abstinence from both sleep and nourishment** (one account states Padre Pio was able to subsist for 20 days on only the **Eucharist** without any other nourishment), the ability to **read hearts**, the **gift of tongues**, the gift of **conversions**, and the **fragrance** from his wounds.

There were both religious and non-religious critics who accused Padre Pio of faking his stigmata, saying he used carbolic acid to make the wounds. Up until the 1930's Pio was subject to a number of investigations.

Pio and his Friary were accused of using the stigmata for financial gain. The Vatican imposed severe sanctions on Padre Pio to reduce publicity about him: it forbade him from saying Mass in public, blessing people, answering letters, showing his stigmata publicly, and communicating with Padre Benedetto, his spiritual director.

From 1924 to 1931, the Holy See made statements denying that the events in Padre Pio's life were due to any divine cause.

Non-Scriptural miracles

Padre Pio

From the 1930's the Holy See began to soften towards Padre Pio and he was once again allowed to celebrate Mass in public.

However, attitudes towards Pio fluctuated with each Pope until the 1960's when Pope Paul VI dismissed all accusations against him.

In 2002 Padre Pio was canonised and officially declared a Saint.

<http://www.padrepio.catholicwebservices.com/ENGLISH/Miracles.htm>

<https://padrepiodevotions.org/testimonials/>



Analysis

Witness reliability

Psychological priming

Power of expectation

Inattention blindness

Charismatic leader

Trickster/deluded

Non-Scriptural miracles

Bernadette Soubirous



In the middle of the nineteenth century, Lourdes was a small garrison town of four or five thousand inhabitants, situated in the foothills of the Pyrénées on the River Gave.

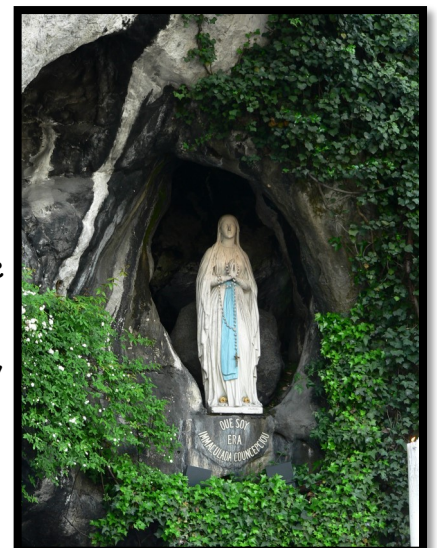
Bernadette Soubirous was the eldest of five children of hard-working parents who had fallen on hard times, and from operating a successful mill had been reduced to living with their family in one small room called the Cachot, which can still be seen today. Bernadette could hardly read or write, and suffered several childhood illnesses leaving her **weak and asthmatic, and small for her age**. From a very

1844 - 1879 early age though, she showed signs of having immense faith in God, and when **she was told she was stupid because she was unable to learn her Catechism**, she whispered in a characteristic way that: 'At least she would always know how to love the good God.' She was a simple girl who worked partly in the house and partly, when with her aunt in Bartrès a village 4 miles from Lourdes, in the fields where her special task was to watch the sheep.

On Thursday 11th February 1858 when she was fourteen years old, together with her sister Marie-Toinette and a friend Jeanne, Bernadette left the Cachot to collect firewood at the foot of a hill called Massabielle, meaning old rock, where there was a small cave or grotto where cattle often sheltered.

Marie-Toinette and Jeanne kicked off their wooden shoes and waded across the little stream in search of dead wood, leaving Bernadette hesitating because of the cold. Just as she was removing her stockings, she heard what sounded like a strong wind and, as she looked toward the Grotto, she noticed that the vegetation growing beneath the higher opening was tossing, though nothing else moved. To her amazement she saw a figure in the opening - a Lady of small stature and incomparable beauty. The Lady was surrounded by light and inclined her head graciously as if inviting Bernadette to approach. She put out her hands too, a little away from her body, and on her right arm could be seen a rosary with large white beads on what seemed a golden chain.

Bernadette felt frightened, and yet she did not want to run away. She was fascinated, experiencing a mysterious attraction and quite naturally took out her rosary and started to recite the prayers. The vision lasted about a quarter of an hour and, as Bernadette finished the rosary prayers, quite suddenly the Lady disappeared.



Non-Scriptural miracles

Bernadette Soubirous

On the way home, Bernadette told Marie-Toinette what she had seen, and although her sister promised secrecy, her sister did not keep her secret and that evening the Soubirous parents entered into what was to become an extremely vexing and puzzling period of their lives with much anguish to follow.

This vision was to be the first of eighteen apparitions over the next few weeks, frequently with many people in attendance out of curiosity, as by now the story of the Lady was the talking point of everyone in Lourdes. During one of these visions, Bernadette was asked by the Lady to drink at the spring and wash in the water, although there was no spring to be seen. Bernadette scratched away at the surface of the earth, and found water rising, which she was able to drink. Soon this spring was yielding 27,000 gallons of water a day, which has been maintained ever since even in times of drought. The spring has been channelled into a reservoir from which the Baths are filled and there are 20 drinking fountain heads. The extraordinary quality of this water is that it never becomes contaminated and can be kept for years, even in an ordinary plastic bottle.

The Lady instructed Bernadette to ask the Priests to build a Chapel by the Grotto for people to process there, and this is at the heart of Lourdes today. All the appearances held the same prayerful characteristics, and at the fifteenth appearance the Lady disclosed herself as the Immaculate Conception. She appeared only three times more to Bernadette, but had nothing more to say.

In spite of enormous opposition from the Town and Church elders of the time, with Bernadette being scrutinised by all and sundry, eventually the Bishop of Tarbes declared the Apparitions as genuine, and from there the whole concept of Lourdes as it is today was developed.

The body of Bernadette in her shrine at Nevers, France Franz Werfel points out that death extinguishes a human face in the twinkling of an eye, but death illuminated the face of Bernadette. It is not always realised by those who visit Lourdes that Bernadette's body remains incorrupt and is laid in a glass reliquary in the Convent of St Gildarde in Nevers, France, where it can be seen today.

Analysis

Witness reliability

Psychological priming

Power of expectation

Trickster/deluded

Physical disturbances—
illness

Non-Scriptural miracles

Lourdes, France

Lourdes is the place that pilgrims go to experience healing today. It is focussed mainly on the grotto where Bernadette Soubirous experienced her visions, however a huge complex has been built to accommodate pilgrims who travel there.

Lourdes today is far different from the isolated mountain hamlet of 1858. During the main pilgrimage season that runs from Easter through the end of October, an average of 25,000 pilgrims gather here **each day** in the shrine located in the centre of Lourdes.



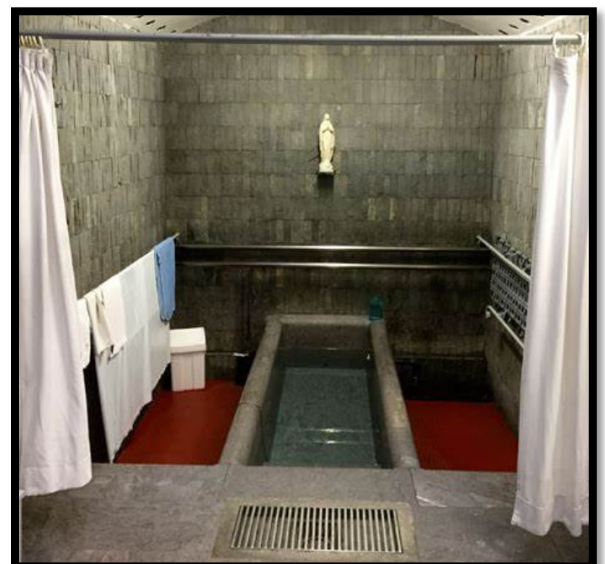
Several huge basilicas and churches dominate the grounds, each with many services throughout the day and evening. The torchlight processions for which Lourdes is famous wind between them, a flickering ribbon of light held by pilgrims singing hymns of praise to Mary.

Pilgrims may pass through the grotto, drink the 'healing' water from the fountains, bath in the waters, light a candle, take part in the processions.

There is a whole industry devoted to the pilgrimage from specially adapted hospital buses, to volunteer hospitaleers who dedicate their free time to assisting the sick who come to be cured.

Visit this website

<https://www.lourdes-france.org/en/>



Non-Scriptural miracles

<https://www.lourdes-france.org/en/>

Lourdes, France

Healing miracles at Lourdes

Since the apparitions, Lourdes has dealt with more than 7000 cases of unexplained cures. 70 cases of unexplained cures have been recognised as miraculous by the Church at this time, the last being in 2018

In a Sanctuary like Lourdes, some pilgrims may reckon they have benefited from an exceptional cure and wish to bear witness to this: so they approach the Bureau des Constatations Médicales (Office of Medical Observations), located in the Sanctuary, to make a declaration.

Beginning with spontaneous and voluntary declarations made to the Medical Bureau by people who claim that they have been cured thanks to the intercession of Our Lady of Lourdes, the specialists of the International Medical Committee (CMIL), decided to put in place the following 3 stages for examining files.

Stage 1: From the "Declared" Cure to the "Unexpected" Cure

Stage 2: from the "Unexpected" Cure to the "Confirmed" Cure.

Stage 3: Opinion for Recognising an Unexpected Cure.

This demonstrates the robust investigations the Catholic Church and its medical professionals employ in order to verify claims of healing miracles.



For those who believe, an explanation
is unnecessary.
For those, who don't believe, an explanation
is impossible."
- St. Bernadette of Lourdes

Non-Scriptural miracles

Case Example 1

Danila Castelli (born 1946) had lived a more or less normal life until the age of 34 when she started having spontaneous and severe blood pressure hypertensive crisis. In 1982 some ultrasound tests detected internal problems. Danila was operated on, receiving a hysterectomy (womb removal). In November 1982 part of her pancreas was removed. She then developed a tumor in her bladder. Despite more surgery, her situation did not improve. Danila then went on pilgrimage to Lourdes in May 1989.

Lourdes, France



On getting out of the baths of holy water, she felt an extraordinary feeling of wellbeing. Shortly after she reported her instantaneous alleged cure. After five meetings between 1989 and 2010, the Bureau certified the cure with an unanimous vote. "Mrs Castelli was cured, in a complete and lasting way, from the date of her pilgrimage to Lourdes - 21 years ago - of the syndrome she had suffered and with no relation with the treatments and the surgeries she received". Danila Castelli has since gone back to a normal life. It is the 69th cure of Lourdes recognized as miraculous.

Case Example 2

Born into a Catholic family in 1870, Gabriel Gargam lost his faith at 15. He worked in the postal service and was carrying out his duties as a sorter in December of 1899, when the train on which he was traveling from Bordeaux to Paris collided with another train, running at 50 miles per hour. Gargam was thrown fifty two feet from the train. He lay in the snow, badly injured and unconscious for seven hours. He was paralyzed from the waist down. He lay in a hospital for eight months. His feet became gangrenous. He could take no solid food and was obliged to take nourishment by a tube. He successfully sued for damages against the railroad. To help Gargam's condition, two trained nurses were needed day and night to assist him. Doctors testified that the man was a hopeless cripple for life.



Eighteen months of continuous pleading from his family later, he accented to be taken to Lourdes. There, he bathed in the holy waters. No effect was seen. Later, a religious procession passed by and a priest blessed him. Suddenly, there was a movement from Gargam. To the amazement of the bystanders, he sat up. While his family were looking on dumbfounded and the spectators gazed in amazement, Gargam said in a full, strong voice that he wanted to get up. They thought that it was a delirium before death, and tried to soothe him, but he was not to be restrained. He got up, walked a few paces and said that he was cured. People looked in wonder, and then fell on their knees and thanked God for this miracle. At his hotel, Gargam was dressed, and proceeded to walk about as if nothing had ever happened. During eighteen months, hardly any food had passed his lips but now he sat down to the table and ate a hearty meal.

On August 20th, 1901, sixty prominent doctors examined Gargam. Without stating the nature of the cure, they pronounced him entirely cured.

For over fifty years he returned annually to Lourdes, helping others. His last visit to the shrine was in August 1952. Gargam died the following March, at the age of eighty-three years.

Non-Scriptural miracles

A baby born weighing just 1lb 1oz (500g) is defying the odds, her mother has said.

Medical miracles

Baby Hallie was born to Robyn Bryant and James Dury at 28 weeks after they were told to prepare for the worst. During the pregnancy, Hallie's legs and arms measured shorter than usual, leaving doctors concerned that she had a genetic issue.

She was delivered via emergency caesarean on Tuesday at the University Hospital of Wales in Cardiff.



Consultants believed Hallie had a genetic or chromosomal condition as she was weeks behind in her development in routine scans. Further tests showed that she had a number of complications, including a fused kidney, and Robyn, 23, and James, 27, were told Hallie could die in the womb at any time from 20 weeks.

Robyn was in hospital at 28 weeks, months before her January 8 due date for an emergency caesarean.

"When they took Hallie out, they realised my placenta hadn't been working the way it should," Ms Bryant said. "She had been starving of oxygen, which was why she was so small.

"I don't think anyone expected her to be breathing when she came out but she proved them all wrong, and was screaming.

"I wasn't prepared for her to be crying so I was blown away.

"She is absolutely tiny - about the size of my phone. "She's having a little bit of oxygen but she's practically breathing alone. It's a miracle.

"We're so grateful to Dr Conner in Fetal Medicine Unit in the Heath, and Dr Watermeyer in Royal Glamorgan. They couldn't do enough for us."

The family expect to spend their first Christmas together in hospital, where doctors expect Hallie to stay until "at least January."

Ms Bryant said: "We could have been so much worse off and she could actually not be here. We're very grateful."

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-wales-46009339>

Analysis

God working through highly skilled doctors?

Non-Scriptural miracles

Medical miracles

Pastor miraculously comes back to life after dying for 15 minutes, credits 'power of prayer'

Chris Wickland, a senior pastor at the Living Word Pentecostal Church in Fareham, died for 15 minutes before "divine providence" saved his life.

A pastor in the U.K. who miraculously came back to life after being dead for 15 minutes has credited the "power of prayer" and "divine providence" for saving him.



In November, Christopher Wickland, pastor of Living Word Pentecostal Church in Fareham, Hampshire, was jumping at a trampoline park with three of his youngest children when he began vomiting and collapsed.

Staff used a defibrillator four times to restart his heart, and he was then rushed to the intensive care unit of St Mary's Hospital, Southampton. There, doctors informed his wife, Tracey, that he had suffered a cardiac arrest and had died for 15 minutes. They also warned her that he could suffer brain and heart damage should he survive.

Tracey said that immediately after learning of her husband's illness, she contacted members of a prayer network that they are part of to start praying for him.

"I put it on Facebook and it was amazing because hundreds of people from around the world contacted me and told me they were praying for Chris," she said, adding that while the jump park staff and doctors did an "incredible job," her husband would be dead "if it wasn't for all these people praying."

Wickland spent almost 48 hours in an induced coma and stayed in the hospital for three weeks before being released on a Sunday morning. Incredibly, he has made a full recovery both physically and mentally.

"This is a miracle that is all down to divine providence and the very quick actions of some people," the pastor told the Daily Mail. "My congregation and other Christians around the world were also praying for me. All this power was harnessed to keep me alive. I'm not lucky, I'm blessed."

Speaking about his recovery, the 47-year-old pastor said: "I've been checked out by the doctors several times now and there's absolutely nothing wrong with me. They can't believe that I died for so long and there's no permanent damage.

Non-Scriptural miracles

Modern day miracle?

"I've always been a bit of a keep-fit fanatic and have returned to running

and lifting weights. I've also been very aware of my diet. So having a cardiac arrest was a bit surprising for me but dying was a far bigger shock."

On Facebook, Wickland, who has since returned to the pulpit at Living Word Church, called the entire ordeal "nothing short of a miracle." He revealed that he has no recollection of anything about his visit to the trampoline park or any of the events connected to his death. The reality of his situation didn't hit him, he said, until he met the jump park staff who saved his life.

I just felt compelled that it would be another story that could make a strong case for God."

"When I saw them face to face and they told me the details of what happened, that's when it really hit me. I almost broke down and cried," he said.

"I kept on thanking the staff for their actions because I never fully understood that I had been dead until they and God intervened. There are no words to describe how grateful I am to them both and the staff at St Mary's."

The pastor also revealed that he never saw or heard anything supernatural when he died.

"I've only been able to piece this together from what my family and others have told me," he said.

"When I was dead, I didn't see or hear anything, as has happened to some people. It's as if everything has just been completely erased from my memory and my mind has completely shut it out."

Numerous stories of medical miracles brought about by the power of prayer have made headlines in recent years.

The 2019 blockbuster "Breakthrough" told the miraculous true story of Joyce and John Smith, a mother and son who relied on the power of prayer and the Holy Spirit following an accident in which John was pronounced deceased by doctors at the hospital.

After 45 minutes, his mother's desperate supplications to God brought him back to life after the doctors lost all hope.

"I've never heard of a story where it's a medical record. It's not like a subjective thing, It's medical record: 'patient dead, mother prayed, patient came back to life,' that is medical record,"

"Breakthrough" producer DeVon Franklin told CP. "So that is so amazing that I just felt compelled that it would be another story that could make a strong case for God."

Analysis

Witness reliability

Psychological priming

Power of expectation

Physical disturbances—
illness

<https://www.christianpost.com/news/pastor-miraculously-comes-back-to-life-after-dying-for-15-minutes-credits-power-of-prayer.html>

What do miracles show?

Miracles are important to Christians as they can be used as evidence for God's existence, as well as showing some of the qualities of God (benevolence, omnipotence, immanence, etc.). For Christians, they also are signs which show that Jesus was the Son of God.

In Christianity, miracles;

- Physically / Morally / Spiritually heal people

- Show that the miracle worker is special

- Nature miracles show God's power over His work and Jesus' ability to command nature

- Driving out evil spirits shows God's blessing

- Healing miracles show God's compassion

N5 Past paper questions

2022

53. Explain why people have different views about miracles. 4
54. (a) Describe the main points of one non-scriptural miracle you have studied. 5
- (b) 'It is reasonable to understand miracles literally.'
- Why might someone say this? 4
55. (a) Explain what people might believe about the laws of nature 5
- (b) 'Divine intervention is an essential part of religious belief.'
- How far do you agree? Give reasons for your answer. 8

2021

55. (a) What might people understand by divine intervention? 5
- (b) Do you think it is reasonable to believe in divine intervention?
- Give reasons for your answer. 4
56. (a) Describe one miracle in **nature** you have studied. 5
- (b) How might science explain 'miracles in nature'? 5
57. '*Scriptural miracles should be understood literally.*'
- How far do you agree? Give reasons for your answer. 8

2019

60. (a) What is meant by 'miracles in nature'? 4
- (b) Why might people reject belief in nature miracles? 5
61. How might religious people understand scriptural miracles? 5
62. (a) Describe one healing miracle. 4
- (b) 'Science fully explains healing miracles.'
- How far do you agree? Give reasons for your answer. 8

N5 Past paper questions

2018

52. (a) Describe the main points of one scriptural miracle. 4
 (b) Why might people understand scriptural miracles literally? 5
 (c) How might someone argue against a literal understanding of scriptural miracles? 5
53. (a) Explain what people might believe about the laws of nature. 4
 (b) 'You need religion and science to understand miracles.'
 Do you agree? Give reasons for your answer. 8

2017

47. Explain why scriptural miracles raise questions for some people. 6
 48. How might a non-religious person explain one miracle you have studied? 6
 49. 'People still experience miracles'.
 Do you agree? Give reasons for your answer. 8

2016

39. (a) Why are questions about miracles important for some people? 4
 (b) Explain one philosophical approach to miracles. 4
40. (a) Explain why someone might interpret a miracle literally. 4
 (b) 'Science provides a complete explanation for miracles.'
 To what extent do you agree? Give reasons for you answer. 8

2015

29. (a) Describe two miracles from scripture. 4
 (b) Explain how a non-religious person might understand scriptural miracles. 5
- 30 (a) Describe the main points of one modern day miracle you have studied. 3
 (b) Miracles are an essential part of religious belief.'
 How far do you agree with this statement? Give reasons for your answer. 8

Higher Past paper questions

2022

4. To what extent do you agree with religious explanations for miracles? 20

2021

4. How convincing are non-religious explanations for miracles? 20

2019/20

'Miracles are real.' How far do you agree? 20

2018

26. To what extent do you agree that accounts of non-scriptural miracles are convincing? 20

2017

How convincing are religious views on miracles? 20

2017 Specimen paper

26. 'Belief that miracles literally happen relies not only on faith, but also on reason'. 20

2016

26. To what extent do you agree that religious and scientific views on miracles are compatible? 20

2015

26. 'It is reasonable to believe that miracles happen'. 20

Knowledge and understanding : being able to show that you know and understand beliefs, concepts and issues through the description of facts and relevant information	Analysis : being able to show that you can pull apart a belief, make connections between beliefs, explain consequences, explain issues	Evaluation : being able to make a judgement or measurement of ; strengths/weaknesses, advantages / disadvantages, impact, importance
Refer to the words in the question eg. A moral issue arising from... is...	Mirror the question!	Mirror the question!
A non-religious view is...	One way this viewpoint (X) links with Y is...	A strength of this belief/practice/viewpoint is...
Christians believe that ...	A consequence of this might be... another could be...	One weakness of this belief/practice/viewpoint is...
The Bible describes X as...	They think this because...	A benefit if this is...
X is an example of ...	An interpretation of this passage could be...	A disadvantage of this is...
This is illustrated by...	As a result...	Christians would strongly disagree because...
One factor is...	This is further evidence that ...	This is important because...
There is also the fact that...	This suggests that...	One of the main criticisms is...
A Christian response to this might be...	This highlights...	It is morally wrong because...
The main argument for this is...	An idea opposed to this view is...	This is a valid view because...