

MIRACLE AND FAITH

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The definition of a miracle is based on an assumption of faith; that is, on the recognition of the existence of a personal, living Being, who is the creator and ruler of all things, and who, through an act of His free will, is able to suspend the operations of cosmic or biological laws that He himself has established.

To the believer, such an interruption of the laws of nature constitutes a miracle; whereas the unbeliever merely regards it as something unusual, and is convinced that some natural explanation for the event will be found in due time. Under these conditions, the first problem is therefore to verify the facts. Cosmic phenomena which may occur are still beyond our grasp; however, biological facts, and particularly the cures of illnesses, can easily be verified.

The accounts of extraordinary events, frequently classified by popular belief as miracles, emanate from all parts of the world; however only in Lourdes does there exist a medical body, working along strictly scientific lines, which is qualified to check and verify the "facts" that are submitted. Its role is purely an objective one; it is not qualified to interpret results or to declare that a particular event is, or is not of a miraculous nature; the theological bodies alone are qualified to issue such interpretations.

The Lourdes Medical Bureau is not concerned with evaluating miracles, but solely with the examining of the cures. In this framework, the Medical Bureau studies the patient's case *before* the pilgrimage, as well as *during* and *after* the pilgrimage. The second phase of this opera-

tion falls within the responsibility of the Bureau itself, while the final phase is conducted by the Association of Lourdes Doctors (numbering 5,500); and the subsequent checks are made by the International Medical Commission, consisting of one hundred physicians of many nationalities.

When, as a result of these inquiries, a cure is acknowledged to have no natural explanation, and as going beyond natural processes, it is forwarded to the theological commissions for their consideration. This leads to the following results.

(I) The first result is the elimination of frauds, and primarily of mental cases. The exclusion of the mentally ill from the Medical Bureau means that they are in Lourdes merely as individuals.

(II) Twelve hundred cases have been upheld by the Medical Bureau, but rejected by other jurisdictions, mostly because of insufficient data. The cases of Winifred Feely and Gerard Baidie are typical of this category.

(III) Forty-nine miracles have been acknowledged and proclaimed as such by the theologians. These include the cases of Justin Duconte-Bouhohorts; P. de Rudder; Rose Martin; Jeanne Fretel and Colonel Pellegrin.

In these investigations, one basic error, namely the search for evidence as such, is to be avoided. There can be no evidence since a miracle is never a proof, but a sign; it is a motive for reflection and of credulity. An amputated leg cannot be restored. God, having created us in a state of freedom, will exert no pressure over our intelligence or our will. We have every reason to believe in Him. It is up to us to give way in our pride and to freely offer Him our faith.