

Miracles, Resurrection, and Other Misunderstood Matters

My column of September 24, taking issue with literal interpretation of biblical accounts of happenings that violate the “laws” of events known to science, has met with two rejoinders.

The first, by Jerry Frederick, claims that science is silent on miracles, understood as unique and unrepeatable events that are inaccessible to scientific study. I once entertained this view, but have long since found it unconvincing. It requires the dogmatic assertion that events happen that are unlike anything we can empirically examine or experientially know. It also lacks objective means by which to determine which purported miracles really happened, and which did not. Other religions also have adherents who claim that such miracles have happened. How can we affirm certain miracles for ourselves while denying them to others?

Far from rejecting the idea of the miraculous, however, I believe (as previously indicated in this column), that all of life is miraculous. That is to say, without having space to go into the details, while all things imaginable are not possible, all actual events, whether they appear to be ordinary or extraordinary, neither violate the prevailing “laws” of the universe nor are they exhaustively explained by them. In short, God has a hand in everything.

Frederick also claims that my opinion of the resurrection of Jesus supplants that of the Apostle Paul. Yet Paul insisted that the resurrection involved a mysterious transformation – from a corporeal body to a “spiritual body” – not a literal raising of the physical body from the dead. I remain confident Paul was right in rejecting the view that resurrection means the raising of our dead bodies.

The second rejoinder, by John Moore, begins with the claim that "what science supports" is the criterion of what I believe. This is a seriously perverse reading of my position. Rather, I claim that one must not assert as factual that which is contrary to (sound) science -- a very different proposition. Like Frederick, he also appeals to an interventionist view of the miraculous, which – as indicated above – I find dogmatic and unconvincing. Moore also fails to grasp my understanding (not rejection) of the resurrection. Moore further implies that I do not think “religious faith may offer truth unavailable to science.” Wrong again.

Religion is obviously an emotionally charged subject, but we nonetheless have an obligation to listen carefully to the views of those with whom we may disagree, and not misrepresent them.

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