

## Miracles: Signs of the Kingdom Coming

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While the problem of providing a coherent theoretical explanation of miracles has plagued Christian theology for centuries, it is only in the last few hundred years that the truth and reality of the miracles recorded in the Bible has become a contentious topic **within** Western Christianity. There have been many attempts to defend these miracles from the criticism of rationalists, atheists, and sceptics generally, but the defence mounted has often been unsatisfactory. The answers offered have been either unconvincing, irrationalistic (“simply believe and ignore intellectual doubts”), or so complicated in terms of philosophical argument that it is hard for ordinary believers to make use of such defence in evangelism and proclamation of the Good News. This situation has come about because miracles are seen as incompatible with “scientific” theology, and so scholars such as Bultmann dissolve the problem of miracles by relegating all such stories to the realm of “myth.” This does not resolve the problem, however, as it simply discards the concept of a miracle as a reality in human life. Since this results in the dismissal of the virgin birth of Christ, the resurrection of the body and other doctrines central to and essential for the whole structure of Christian thought, it is obviously unsatisfactory to merely consign them to the dustbin of a scientific age.

The problem of miracles did not arise with the Enlightenment, although it is as a result of the Enlightenment that they have largely been discarded by many Christians. Miracles were a problem in pagan Roman times, and the conflict with “science” and belief in miracles pre-dates Christianity. Thus it is inaccurate to abandon belief in miracles because we now live in a scientific age when such events cannot be believed any more. Belief in miracles has **always** been in conflict with scientific theories.

The first Christian thinker to address the problem of miracles was Augustine.<sup>1</sup> Basing his approach on a Stoic conception of the nature of God’s relationship to the cosmos,

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<sup>1</sup> For details of his views see C J Gousmett. “Creation order and miracle according to Augustine.” *Evangelical Quarterly* 60 (1988) 217-240.

Augustine considered a miracle to be the activation of special causes in creation, the seminal reasons (*rationes seminales* or *logoi spermatikoi*) which otherwise were inactive, but if activated brought to light hitherto unknown effects. In some instances miracles were simply speeded up natural developments, such as the changing of Moses' staff into a serpent, or the appearance of lice from dust. This came from the "scientists" of the day, who thought that snakes were generated from rotting wood, and that lice arose from spontaneous generation from the dust. These miracles were then for Augustine perfectly natural, only the speed at which they occurred was remarkable. Other miracles arise from unknown causes hidden in God, which could be activated only by God.

For Augustine, miracles do not conflict with the creation-order, since both usual and unusual events in nature are the expression of God's will. He contrasted God's acts in creation with his acts in providential caring for that creation, but miracles were nevertheless based on the actualisation of creational possibilities. He defined a miracle as that which is contrary to our usual experience of the course of nature. It is merely the opening up of potential in conditions other than those which are ordinary, well-known to us. Miracles are wonderful only to those who are not attuned to God's working in creation: he held that if we were merely to see correctly, then the growth of plants, the generation of animals, any event whatsoever would appear marvellous to us, and miracles are given to re-awaken our awareness of God's providential care for the creation. Everything that happens is through the will of God. If a miracle then is the result of the will of God, then for God it cannot be extra-ordinary. As our faith and understanding increases through reading Scripture, we will increasingly recognise the will of God, and consequently our wonder at miracles will diminish.

Because miracles are the usual acts of God in providence, they appear miraculous only to us. This would not be so if it had not been for the fall. Because of our sinfulness we do not see (or refuse to acknowledge) the miracles of creation around us. These miracles are **signs** to the believer to awaken faith in God, and to restore our awareness of the miracle of creation. For Augustine, a miracle does not occur contrary to nature since its germ or seed is laid in nature. By faith the potential of the creation is led into specific directions it would not have otherwise taken. Because of this view, Augustine

is able to see miracles as the work not only of believing Christians, but of anyone who has faith strong enough to direct the powers of creation. He thus identifies the power of God with the forces within creation which can be directed by faith. His emphasis on this point has prevented him from seeing that true miracles are worked only through the power of the Spirit, a power **other than** that which is available to us within the creation order. This power of God is not an intrusion into the creation order, in an interventionist fashion, since all events happen and are sustained by God's providential power. It means that the creation is **dependent** on God's redemptive power, which is not to be found within the creation order.

By separating creation from providence he perceives miracle as part of providence, that is, something **other than** creation, but fails to see that the otherness is part of the work of **redemption**. Augustine does recognise that miracle is based on creation - it is not an intervention which disrupts the creation order. But because he fails to see that miracles are redemptive, he must replace the "old root" of creation (Adam) with the "new root" (Christ) so as to maintain the relation of miracle to the (new) creation order, while recognising its redemptive significance.

Since for Augustine a miracle is contrary only to our usual experience of nature, it does not conflict with the true order of nature, the world-plan of God which determines the nature of each thing. God is at work developing the created principles hidden in the world. Nature is the result of God's will and so nothing in nature can occur contrary to God's will. What seems to us to be contrary to nature is a result of our lack of understanding of the will of God. Therefore everything in nature is miraculous.

But, if we make every action of God in sustaining his creation into a miracle, a miracle then becomes indistinguishable from any other event; and if everything is a miracle then nothing is a miracle. Augustine made a distinction between the creation acts of God in the beginning, and the work of God in providential care for his creation, a distinction developed by the Stoic philosophers, and a distinction which makes sense only within their cosmology. However, a Biblical cosmology does not make this distinction: instead, it affirms that the work of God in bringing creation into

being and continually sustaining that creation is all of one piece. Creation came into being through God's establishing the laws for its existence, laws which are constantly upheld and maintained by God. There is no break between the establishment and maintaining of those laws. There is a distinction between God's act of creation in the beginning and his present relationship with that creation, since he is no longer creating new things; but that does not warrant a distinction between creation and providence as if they are somehow radically different. Only in the Stoic system does this make sense; it is in conflict with Scripture in its presentation of God's constant covenantal relationship with the creation, and it is in terms of covenant, not the Stoic idea of providence, that we should understand God's relationship with his creation.

Augustine's approach has been influential in Christian theology ever since, found in many scholars such as Archbishop Trench in his **Notes on the Miracles of Our Lord** (1846). However, Augustine's neo-Platonic conception of nature, in which matter was given form by rational causes, resulted in the theory of an autonomous natural order. This unbiblical dualistic tension in Augustine's thought would give rise to later conceptions of creation and miracle, as for instance in the Scholastic theologians, who spoke of miracles either as *contra naturam*, an act against the laws of nature, or as *supra naturam*, an act which suspended the laws of nature. This results in a series of dualistic contrasts:

- supernatural / natural
- immediate / mediate acts of God
- abnormal / normal
- primary / secondary logical causes

A particular doctrine of creation will have a corresponding doctrine of miracle. Dualistic views of creation always result in a view of miracle as a supernatural intervention into the course of nature, which is considered virtually independent of God. This eventually led to Deism, which maintained the independence of creation over against God, but in a mechanistic world-view there was no place for miracles as violations or suspensions of the creation order. Deism was the logical consequence of a mistaken postulation of the relationship between God and creation. Monistic views will tend to emphasise that God's creative will cannot be contradicted by a later

decision by God to perform miracles; the result of this is either to identify nature with the miraculous, or to deny the miraculous altogether. The former position is the one adopted by Augustine. In this way he develops the view that everything, including creation itself, is a miraculous work of God. The special miracles of grace are part of the order of creation, and participate in God's work of providence in unfolding the potential hidden in creation. This providence is distinct from the work of creation, as the one is temporal while the other takes place outside of time. It means that there is a radical distinction between creation and providence, rather than the continuity of the creating Word, which sustains all things in being. The background to this separation of creation and providence is Stoic philosophy. It results in forced exegesis of Scripture, as is evident from Augustine's treatment of John 5:17.

The Deistic rejection of the idea of miracle hinged on the basic misunderstanding of creation as autonomous nature functioning according to laws which are violated by a miracle. A God who is distant from the world, an autonomous independent world, into which God intervenes only on infrequent occasions (usually restricted to Biblical history) still leaves an autonomous world unaffected: these miracles are only "supernatural," that is, extrinsic to the world - and therefore in a very real sense superfluous. Such intervention is not an integral involvement with creation, but an external reaction to events in which God otherwise plays no explicit role. A miracle is seen as a special event which lets the world know that God is still there, even though he is basically unconcerned.

Such a view postulates the normativity of the world which, however, in reality, is in the grip of the law of sin and death. This perspective of an interventionist relationship will not have a truly biblical view of sin and redemption. It will see evil in the world as relatively minor external action, rather than the spiritual mis-direction which goes to the very heart of life, requiring equally radical redemption. Such views usually expect God to eventually abandon the world and its contamination to destruction, leaving us to look for a new earth, radically discontinuous with this one, instead of confessing the Biblical hope of the renewal of all things, and neglecting the command to be the light for a world lost in darkness. We need to radically reject any notion of a world independent and autonomous over against God, and recognise the reality of sin

as an all-pervading corruption of human life which has turned away from God. Only thus will we be able to recognise the full significance of the cosmic redemption of Jesus Christ, and his call to obedience arising from the renewal of the heart to serve God in every area of life, and in then we will see miracles occurring as signs of the kingdom in our midst.

In scholastic assumptions, the acts of God are reduced to rational problems to be analytically solved by the human intellect. Divine decrees are accommodated to the laws of causality resulting in the tyranny of logical probability, and God is reduced to a major premise in deductive argumentation. This is one consequence of seeing miracles in correlation with the order of creation, and the resulting problems arising from the idea that miracles are violations or suspensions of natural law.

However, God and the world are not competing forces. The world is constantly upheld and ordered by God, and the world responds to the law which God established for it. Miracles cannot be seen as a violation or suspension of the law of God, as if God was in conflict with himself - suspending his own laws to allow himself to act contrary to the way he has decreed creation should function. The Bible does not speak of “nature” as a closed system but of God’s creation, into which he acts, to cause grass to grow, rain to fall etc. (Psalm 147). Because the Bible does not speak of “natural laws” as the independent order of nature, it cannot lead to the view that miracles violate such laws. While Israel was sure of God’s existence, and saw everything as dependent on God,<sup>2</sup> the Greeks were sure of the order of nature, and wondered if there was a place for God in relation to it.<sup>3</sup> This was the origin of the miraculous as a **problem**.

The difficulties arise because miracles have been seen throughout the history of Christian thought in terms of a contrast with the normal functioning of creation. Thus normally the creation functions in a particular way, but abnormally its laws are suspended or violated when a miracle occurs. Any and every attempt to understand a

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<sup>2</sup> The Israelites did not want proof of God’s **existence** but of his **character**.

<sup>3</sup> See C F D Moule. **Miracles. Cambridge Studies in their philosophy and history**. London: A R Mowbray, 1965, p. 54.

miracle in that framework always founders on the same rocks: God is acting against himself in an inconsistent and unpredictable way.

With the rise of modern science and the stress on the regularity and unbreakable character of the laws of nature, especially in the Newtonian mechanistic universe, miracles became more and more problematic as the violation of the laws of motion and cause and effect (i.e. Hume's criticism of miracles). No longer could miracles such as the staff of Moses turning into a snake be considered the operation of otherwise natural causes, since it was discovered that snakes do not come into being in that way. How then did that miracle occur? As scientific knowledge increased, various "causes" which had been proposed for miracles became less and less supportable, and the problem of the "God of the gaps" presented itself: if miracles are to be ascribed to causes unknown to us, then as scientific knowledge increases, the number of unknown causes decreases, and with it the role of God in the cosmos. Eventually it was realised that scientific knowledge could encompass all causes in the cosmos, and so God could be discarded as a working hypothesis even though all causes were not yet discovered. But since it was considered they eventually would be, why not discard this hypothesis as it would obviously eventually be of no use whatsoever. Thus miracles became incompatible with the modern scientific view of reality, and theologians such as Bultmann concurred in this.

Apologists have tried to maintain the credibility of miracles by re-affirming the dualistic approach in which the supernatural power of God suspends or violates the natural world, thus bringing a miracle into being. But with the increasing recognition that such dualism is itself problematic, this approach has failed to maintain the credibility of miracles.

Can we then find a way in which we can continue to believe the Biblical witness to miracles, and expect to see them occur even today when science has disclosed so much of reality to us? I believe so, provided we discard the approach taken throughout the history of Christian thought, rooted ultimately in a Stoic cosmology, and substitute a different approach.

Since the problem is that miracles were considered to be incompatible with the law-governed character of creation, which even Scripture revealed so long ago, then miracles function in a way which does not suspend, violate, contradict or otherwise work against that lawfulness established and sustained constantly by God. The approach which Augustine used, that miracles are merely the normal functioning of natural causes, is at the root of the problem. Miracles are not to be considered in terms of creation at all. Consider this problem: if Adam and Eve had not sinned, would miracles of healing, for instance, have ever occurred? According to Augustine, yes and no. Yes, because they are merely the functioning of natural causes, and no, because it is sin that prevents us from recognising the miraculous nature of ordinary life. A miracle merely re-awakens our sense of awe and wonder. But this is rooted in his idea that miracles arise from causes already laid in the creation.

The Scholastic approach answers no, because miracles are the result of God suspending or violating his law, a necessity only because of sin. But the order of creation is thereby disrupted, and so a problem is created in that approach to miracles.

However, if we consider that miracles are not acts of God which fall within the rubric of **creation**, but under **redemption**, then we have the way out of the impasse generated by the Augustinian and Scholastic approaches. Miracles really occur in the world, not as supernatural events in contrast to otherwise natural events, but as the breaking in of God's **normal** to restore and redeem that which has become **abnormal**. Miracles violate only one law, the law of sin and death, since miracles are working against that which brings corruption and destruction to God's orderly and law-ful world. Miracles work not against **nature** but against **sin**, and it is the presence of **sin** and its consequences in death, sickness, demonisation, and so on which calls forth the working of miracles.

Any view of miracles which sees them to be contrary to nature then views the present order of nature as normative; therefore a miracle breaks into the normal course of events. However, the Scriptures tell us that the order of nature has been disrupted by sin, and thus functions abnormally; the law of sin and death has been brought into play. We cannot pin down exactly what that means for the world, since sin is not



subject to any law for its existence, and so the consequences of sin are not orderly but arbitrary, unpredictable and uncontrollable. The Epistle of James speaks of the results of the sin of the tongue as a raging fire that that nobody can control, and similarly with other sins.

Sin as a violation of the order of God's creation has no right to exist; it is there only as a parasite, a virus invading God's world and feeding off it in an illegitimate way. It results in an abnormal situation, producing sickness and death, even for innocent people, since there is no lawfulness to sin, no legitimacy for its nature, no checks on its effects. The law of sin and death is like a wild animal unleashed to create havoc and mayhem: its only certainty is that eventually death claims us all, and other than that, there is no way we can anticipate the results which it brings.

In contrast to the chaos resulting from sin, God acts into his creation to bring redemption and restore order. Miracles are divine re-affirmations of the normativity of the creation order. If a miracle goes contrary to the effects of the fall, then what appears to be contrary to nature is in fact a restoration of a distorted creation to normativity. The miracles of Christ make visible the fulfillment of the promised redemption: the coming of the kingdom of God. They make visible the restoration of the creation, and thus the all-embracing and redemptive significance of the kingdom.

Miracles are reminders of the "already" dimension of the coming kingdom, i.e. "kingdom signposts." The miracles spoken of in Scripture are always a "sign" that points away from itself to a greater reality: the coming of God's kingdom breaking into the world as the re-establishment of his reign over all creatures. A "healing" that results in attention being given to the one healed, or from a too-ready desire to see a healing where there is none, does not demonstrate the coming of the kingdom of God. The signs of the New Testament were to clearly demonstrate that the power of the usurper Satan, was being challenged head-on and would be rendered powerless by the breaking-in of the kingdom of God. This does not mean that Satan had legitimate right to rule prior to the coming of Jesus; it simply means that his illegitimate claim to rulership was finally ended with the appearance of the true King. Any power he now

exercises is not as a ruler, but as one who has deceived others into thinking that he still rules.

Christ's miracles have no purpose in themselves. They are signs of the truth of his proclamation that the kingdom of heaven has come. They are not more predominant than his teaching, because they support his teaching, not supplant it. That is why there is a close correlation between the miracles performed by Christ and the faith of the people. A miracle strengthens faith and recognition of the authority of Jesus, but must be expected in faith. This does not mean there was a dependence on the disposition of the people for Christ's ability to work signs, but that a miracle performed in circumstances where there is no faith would only be a display of power. It could not display the true significance of Christ's mission in proclaiming the coming of the kingdom. This is why Christ refused to give a sign to his opponents. A true miracle can be discerned only in faith since the true purpose of Christ's mission was to preach the kingdom, seeking the believing repentant response of the people, not simply recognition of his power. A miracle has importance only for the preaching of the Gospel; it has no independent significance.

There were various occasions when someone was healed by Christ but this did not result in faith on the part of some witnessing the miracle; rather it simply angered them and made them more determined to have Christ done away with. (John 12:37) The miracle in itself was insufficient to bring a recognition of the breaking in of the kingdom: without faith as well it was merely a demonstration of power, not a sign that pointed to the reality of which it was a witness. This could be discerned only in faith, even if the reality of the miracle was admitted. Jesus went so far as to condemn those who had witnessed his miracles but still did not believe. (Matthew 11:20-24). Note that Jesus' opponents never denied miracles had taken place, rather, they wished to assign credit directly to God, or to challenge the way in which Jesus carried out his miracles, i.e. on the Sabbath.

Signs are not self evident meaning. The resurrection of a man from the dead would be subject to endless speculation. What made Jesus'

resurrection so unique was that it came against the background of a messianic preparation and as fulfillment.<sup>4</sup>

Receiving or performing a miracle is not a sign of participation in the kingdom which is to come (Matthew 7:22, Luke 10:20, 17:17-19), since even unbelievers can work false miracles by the power of Satan (“lying wonders” which deceive, Matthew 24:24, 2 Thess 2:9, Rev 13:15). Only responding in obedience to the call to repent and believe in Christ results in belonging to the kingdom.

If we are to understand a miracle to be the work of God in relationship to his creation, redirecting and restoring what he has made contrary to the effects of the fall, then it is impossible to postulate that miracles came to an end with the Apostles (or in any other period) without necessitating a radical change in the nature of God’s relationship to the entire creation - something which has absolutely no warrant in Scripture. Thus we can still expect to see miracles worked by the Spirit today by those who are in faith-union with Christ. Miracle will be evident wherever the redemption of Christ is found, since it is a manifestation of the power of the Spirit bringing the kingdom into being. The dispensational view, beloved by conservative Calvinists, e.g. B B Warfield,<sup>5</sup> postulates a change in the covenantal relationship between the inauguration of the coming kingdom by Christ and his return to consummate what he has already begun. There is no change of course within this period: and so miracles are as possible today as at the time of the apostles, and just as much needed as signs of the kingdom in our midst.

Miracles are also the demonstration that the mandate given by God to human kind to care for and rule over the earth is being restored in Christ. The so-called “nature-miracles” such as the feeding of the five thousand is not a restoration to normativity, but a demonstration which makes known God’s power over his creation through his obedient servants. Jesus did not work his miracles through his divine nature, but as a man full of the power of the Spirit and faith.

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<sup>4</sup> M Inch. “The apologetic use of “sign” in the fourth Gospel.” *Evangelical Quarterly* 42 (1970) 35.

<sup>5</sup> Also found in John Chrysostom.

How was it that Jesus was able to perform miracles? Very soon after the close of the New Testament age it began to be held that Jesus performed miracles because he was divine and therefore obviously had the power to do so. This view was held by many of the church fathers, and was reinforced by the document called the **Tome** of Leo, the bishop of Rome, adopted by the Council of Chalcedon in 451 AD. This **Tome** laid out the way in which Christ was to be viewed as both divine and human, but unfortunately the miracles were assigned to his divine nature and not to the anointing of the Spirit on his human nature. Why is this important? Not only because the Biblical evidence points to the later view, but because it raises the problem of the genuine humanity of Christ. Was he really a human being in every respect, or was he in some ways masquerading as a human being while he performed miracles as God? We tend to think of the Trinity in almost hierarchical terms, with the Son subordinate to the Father, and the Spirit subordinate to the Father and the Son. Thus while we have little difficulty with understanding the Father sending the Son, and the risen and ascended Son sending the Spirit, we often fail to reflect on the work of the Spirit in and through the Incarnate Son, to whom the Spirit was sent by the Father. Berkhof has stated in his book on the Spirit

Jesus can be the sender of the Spirit only because he is first the receiver and bearer of the Spirit. Now in the tradition of the church and its theology, the first relation is very much neglected. That fact is understandable insofar as this relation is often abused by those who want to emphasize Jesus' humanity at the cost of his divinity. From the time of the Adoptionists at the end of the second century until the Liberals of our time, there is an inclination to see Jesus mainly or exclusively as the one who, in the line of the prophets and of all true children of God, though more than all of them, is gifted with the Spirit. The church, in reaction against that trend of thought, neglected this

aspect and stressed, in an equally one-sided way, the fact that Jesus has the Spirit at his disposal and that it is his gift to his church.<sup>6</sup>

We have neglected to reflect adequately on the relationship between the incarnate Word and the Spirit who descends and anoints and empowers Christ to carry out his ministry as the Messiah. This neglect comes about because of an over-emphasis on the divinity of Christ, obscuring to a considerable extent his true humanity. It is salutary to reconsider the humanity of Christ. He is the model human being for us, the one who came to show human beings in the grip of sin what it means to be truly human - what we have lost through our sin, how we must be in a world of fallen human beings, and what we will become when the redemption of the whole of the creation is finally attained in Christ. Who Christ is, and to have a sound understanding of the nature of his humanity, is therefore crucial to our life in this world. This comes to full expression in our consideration of the doctrine of miracles.

Jesus did not work his miracles through his divine nature, but as a man full of the power of the Spirit and faith. This can be seen from passages such as Luke 11:20, "If I drive out demons by the finger of God, then the kingdom of God has come to you." The parallel passages Matthew 12:28 and Mark 3:23-30 identify the "finger of God" with the Holy Spirit. Luke 4:14-23, where Jesus returned from the desert in the power of the Spirit, and read the passage from Isaiah 61, "The Spirit of the Lord is on me..." which he correlated with reports of his miracles in Capernaum. The book of Acts makes it even more explicit. Acts 2:22. "Jesus of Nazareth was a man accredited by God to you by miracles, signs and wonders, which God did among you through him, as you yourselves know." Acts 10:38 "you know... how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and power, and how he went around doing good and healing all who were under the power of the devil, because God was with him."

Jesus performed His miracles as the first real man of God, in order to signify thereby that to a new humanity in Him all authority and power would be given to direct the

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<sup>6</sup> H Berkhof. **The Doctrine of the Holy Spirit**. Richmond: John Knox Press, 1964, p. 18. See however the criticisms of Berkhof's alternative approach to the relationship between Christ and the Spirit in T Smaill. **The Giving Gift**. London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1988, pp. 41-44.

history of the world towards its consummation in accordance with God's good pleasure.<sup>7</sup> There are no passages which correlate the miracles of Jesus with his divinity, and to do so is to short-change the reality of his messianic office. Jesus performed miracles as a human being anointed with the power of the Holy Spirit, and expected people to recognise that his miracles were proof of his messianic office (cf. Matthew 11:1-6). It also undercuts the promise of Jesus that those who believe in him would also perform miracles. John 14:11-14. We are given the power to perform miracles because we have received the anointing of the same Spirit that was on Jesus: not an identical anointing, because his was for a unique office as Messiah and redeemer, but the works he performed in the power of the Spirit are still possible today because we have received the same Spirit. Another purpose for the miraculous power of the Spirit being given to us is to demonstrate that Christ has indeed been raised from the dead and has ascended into heaven to receive the promise of the Holy Spirit from the Father to pour out on his followers (Acts 2:33).

This provides us with another aspect of the true miracle: it is a manifestation of God's power, a spiritual power not found within the creation: the breakthrough of the Kingdom of heaven. This does not imply that a miracle is the result of divine intervention. God's power is not intruding into an other wise independent and self-sufficient creation; it is a manifestation of the power of God, which constantly sustains and governs all things, to deliver the creation from the effects of sin. The power of God which makes the winds blow (Psalms 147:18; 148:8) is the same power which parts the Red Sea (Exodus 14:21) so as to deliver the Israelites from their oppressors.

A miracle is a work of redemption, restoring brokenness and delivering from distress, building the faith of believers and confounding the wicked, who when confronted with the power of God reject it in unbelief (Luke 11:14-16). It is the work of the Spirit in our midst building the Kingdom of God, leading it to its fulfillment and strengthening it in its conflict against the demonic powers of darkness (Acts 4:23-31). The Kingdom

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<sup>7</sup> J C de Moor. **Towards a biblically theo-logical method. A structural analysis and further elaboration of Dr G C Berkouwer's hermeneutic-dogmatic method.** Kampen: J H Kok, 1980, p. 370. *Thesis* 12.

of God in our midst will have its fullest expression when the power of God to restore and make new is expressed in every area of our lives, not just in physical healing, important though that is, but in delivering us from bondage to the evil spirits of the age, which have the ascendancy in academic activity, politics, economics, ethics, aesthetics, physical, biological and human sciences, in our work and in our leisure.

Signs of the kingdom include giving a glass of water in the name of Christ, housing the homeless, feeding the hungry: sure indications that sin is being driven back and that selflessness is being renewed through the gospel. That does not mean simply that we as individuals take homeless people into our homes, or invite the poor for meals, although it may mean that. It also includes fighting indifferent governments (national and local) to ensure housing policies that enable everyone to be adequately housed, that food is available at a price that can be afforded, and that those without the means to buy food are provided for. The signs of the kingdom apply as much to corporate action in society as they do to personal concern for those we have contact with. This does not mean that the kingdom will come by means of political activity or by individual concern. It means that where such concerns are directed by the gospel of Christ, and empowered by the Spirit of God, there we have a sign of the coming kingdom. It is a pointer to the renewal of the whole creation which is promised. It is the breaking in to the system of this world the beginnings of a whole new order whose manifestation may be weak and seemingly ineffective, but will in time to come prove to be the all-conquering rule of King Jesus. When we have the vision to see the kingdom coming in small and weak activities of still-sinful human beings, then we will recognise that the power of God is unstoppable.