

## MIRACLES: NINE PROPOSITIONS

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Below follow nine propositions about miracles.

These propositions did not simply fall out of the blue sky for me. Nor did I simply shake them out of my sleeves. I came to these propositions after years of wondering what “miracle” means, especially in the Bible. I finally came to some conclusions after reading the original version of the Kuyper Essay 1 in this book. Another book that influenced my thinking over a period of some decades is Dr. J. H. Diemer’s *Natuur en Wonder*.<sup>1</sup>

When I originally and at last penned these propositions, I had them published in the alumni magazine of Calvin Theological Seminary of Grand Rapids, MI, USA, in order to invite critique from my fellow alumni. I did get some and most of it critical, but none of it foundational. All the criticism was based on the very perspective that I rejected when developing these propositions. They did not change my mind and the propositions remained as were.

So, I now share them with a wider reading audience and challenge you also to critique these propositions. However, if you go about it on basis of the dualistic approach the rejection of which is foundational to these propositions, you are not helping me much. Then you will have to argue the basic perspective, not the propositions themselves. I warn you that, after having studied that dualistic perspective for many decades and having based most of my working years fighting its debilitating effect on the Christian community of Nigeria, I will not easily be persuaded to adopt that for myself once again. Freeing myself from it was an exhilarating experience of liberation that many others have also experienced.

1. The power to perform miracles and other works beyond science in its present stage comes from the original creation order and can thus be considered normal. They are part of the equipment given us to fulfil our original calling: the Cultural Mandate.

2. Due to the fall, many creation powers waned, fell into disuse, but were retained by small minorities in all cultures. Sometimes they are used for the good of man; often they have become distorted and thus used for purposes of oppression and private gain.

3. Eventually, due to the influence of the Holy Spirit through centuries of exposure to Biblical teaching, it dawned on the Christian community that

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<sup>1</sup> Diemer, J. H. *Natuur en Wonder*. Amsterdam: Buijten & Schipperheijn, 1963.

they ought not to fear nature but control it, harness it. This became the initial impetus to modern science. The writings of early Christian pioneers in modern science testify to this spiritual foundation to modern science. The fact that science, or, rather, many of its practitioners, today see little connection between Christianity and science, does not negate its objective history. Thus science is the dominant way in which Christ's promise in John 14:12 was fulfilled in modern times.

4. Science appeared so successful and compelling that in time people tended to reject any kind of knowledge that did not result from science or is beyond its pale. The fact that many of the powers in point 1 above were more highly developed in 3rd world cultures made it easy for Westerners, including missionaries, to poohoo them as mere superstition, fake and devilish. Hence missionaries ridiculed them and the new Christian communities officially adopted the same attitude, even though in reality and practice that worldview and its consequences continued to operate powerfully in their lives. This resulted in tensions within the mission churches. This development also led to emphasis on biomedicine, while all traditional African healing was relegated to the official domain of the devil and to ignorance.

5. These non-or pre-scientific powers have been real from the beginning, then waned and became distorted through sin, marginalized by a scientific civilization, but now are coming into their own once again. This is due to an increasing recognition of the limitation of science as well as to the charismatic movement. It is due also to an increasing insistence by people from the world's south, including Christians, that their traditional powers can no longer be rejected as mere superstition and evil. In Christ, these powers can be and are being restored, but in a positive way and now used for healing rather than control, for liberation rather than oppression.

6. The spiritual powers of which charismatics have been talking for so long are natural powers, restored and reformed through Christ. The miracles of both the OT and NT are expressions of human powers restored by God (OT), Christ (NT). Christ has not brought something new to creation, but He restored what was there to begin with.

7. Thus the so-called supernatural gifts are natural abilities that needed the touch of the Spirit for renewal and revival. The SUPERnatural aspect lies in this renewal, not in the ability itself.

8. Science is no threat to the idea of miracles. An event experienced as a miracle or described (in the Bible) as one may very well be amenable to scientific investigation. That does not make it less of a miracle. The Bible describes some of the most common acts of God as wonderful and miraculous--eg. His providential care over nature from moment to moment. It is that very nature that constitutes the target of science. The spiritual and the empirical are merely different aspects of the one reality.

9. The difference between my view and that of charismatics is that I relate all these powers to nature and creation. In this way I can account for the fact that these powers are available in all cultures and religions. I can account for the difference between Moses' miracles and those of the magicians and recognize the latter as genuine, though distorted and used in the service of oppression. Charismatics, in their cutting all these phenomena from nature and creation and insisting on their being purely spiritual are in danger of trivializing the Gospel and of becoming downright silly. They cannot account for the world-wide phenomena of miracles in a satisfactory way. It simply will not do to relegate all this to the devil and deceit. In brief, it is their basic dualism that makes their views untenable. However, I AM grateful that they have forced the rest of us to take miracles once again seriously.