

Maximilian Ledochowski

# The Miracles of the Bible Viewed Differently

Part 1 the New Testament

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# Introduction

The New Testament describes numerous “miracles” that are meant to prove the “divinity” of Jesus and thus support the faith. Most of them are of a medical nature, miraculous healings, raising the dead and other occurrences that could not be explained with the knowledge of the time.

It is not possible to make medical diagnoses 2000 years after Christ lived. But if one interprets the symptoms described in the Bible with today’s knowledge, diseases can be suspected or diagnoses can be assigned. Even today, many diagnoses are not only made with technical aids or blood tests, but only “clinically”. This means that the doctor makes the diagnosis on the basis of the symptoms that the patient describes or on the basis of his observations. Thus, even today, the diagnosis of schizophrenia is not made by any laboratory tests, but on the basis of symptoms such as “descriptions of hallucinations”, hearing commanding, so-called “imperative” voices or “dialogues with non-existent persons, so-called dialogizing voices”, etc. So if someone in the Bible said that he heard the voice of God commanding him to do this or that, then with today’s knowledge, one would call that “imperative voices” and judge it as a symptom of psychotic illness. Or if one reads in the Bible that Christ, hanging on the cross, had a lance rammed into his side by a Roman soldier and “blood and water” flowed out, then with today’s knowledge one can assume that Christ must have had a haemorrhagic pleural effusion (a collection of blood and secretions between the lungs and ribs) at that time.

Thus, based on the descriptions in the Bible, one can surmise one disease or another. This does not mean that the assumptions I make in this book are necessarily correct. However, it seems more likely that many a miracle was a normal phenomenon and not due to supernatural influence by God.

Likewise, there are translation variants which seem more plausible than ones recognized by the Church as valid at present. For example, the description of the “virginity” of Mary, the Mother of God, is translated very differently. The Catholic Church assumes the “virgin birth” and translates the passage in Matthew “Behold, the virgin shall conceive a child, she shall bear a son...” (Mt 1:22) while non-theological interpreters assume that the translation should correctly read: “Behold, the young

woman will conceive and bear a son...”<sup>1</sup> It is not intended to start a dispute here as to which translation or interpretation is the correct one, but it should serve as an example that even a slight change in translation can cause serious differences in the view and understanding of the Holy Scriptures and how supposed miracles can be “dissolved” by such small differences.

For me, the real miracle of Christian teaching is that even 2000 years ago Jesus preached views that we would still call very modern or revolutionary today. Renunciation of violence, love of neighbour, forgiveness, and the separation of church and state were unusual revolutionary thoughts at that time and represent the actual value of the Christian faith. Miracles may have served in the past to make the Christian doctrine “believable” to the less educated population. Christ was actually one of the first “modern” thinkers who also perceived marginalized persons as “human beings”. Who wanted to see the idea of revenge replaced by charity. Who accepted the diversity of nature and saw it as a creation intended by God. All highly modern views. This is where the real miracle lies.

In the 21st century, however, it no longer seems appropriate to believe in supernatural miracles and to use them as “proof of truth” for a religion. We have learned in the course of history that many “facts” considered to be correct are quite wrong from today’s point of view. While science has dealt with errors of interpretation that corresponded to the spirit of the times and corrected them over time, this is not the case with many religions. The reason often given for this rigidity of interpretation is the need for unchanging moral foundations. This may be partly true. However, we live in an age in which great problems await mankind and modern moral authorities would be in demand. Humans can interfere with creation by interfering with the genome and changing it forever. Artificial intelligence can take over human decisions, but is characterized by having no conscience. Medicine is not only replacing artificial limbs, but producing implants that interact with the brain, creating human-machine hybrids (cyborgs). The increasing exploitation of the world’s resources and impending scarcity of resources increases the risk of unprecedented conflicts. While technical development is advancing rapidly, human moral and social development is lagging behind and unable to keep pace with new demands.

It is actually becoming more and more important that the churches or moral authorities stand up and establish and convey ethical and moral values adapted to the times, values that do justice to the problems of modern society and are not focused on problems that existed thousands of years ago. Problems of our time are not whether the pill may be taken or not, whether divorced people may go to communion or not, etc. Such thinking should actually come to an end in the third millennium. But this does not mean that religions should be abolished. No, there is a need for institutions that are independent of the state and that convey values and give comfort and a sense of life to people. The focus should not be on trivialities, not on temporary media hypes, but on the essentials that make us human beings and that do justice to the

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<sup>1</sup> Translation error made Mary a virgin: Published 01/28/2009. <https://www.welt.de/kultur/article3100214/Uebersetzungsfehler-machte-Maria-zur-Jungfrau.html>.

common survival of mankind. And it must be finally recognized that there is no infallibility and no exclusivity claim to be the only salvific institution.

What is the purpose of this book? It is not about destroying Christians' faith. On the contrary. We have to realize that well-being can only be achieved by acting morally and ethically; that by doing so, we cause changes in our brain that ultimately benefit ourselves. Modern research shows us that God did not create man, but man created God (in his brain). In the human brain, there are predispositions to create a belief and that is good. We need faith to find our way in the world and to feel comfortable. But we do not need miracles. In the information age, we don't need religions that tell us fairy tales nor religious representatives who believe that one can prove God through so-called "miracles". The "holy" scriptures may have been helpful at a time when there were mainly oral traditions, when most people could neither write nor read. In the third millennium, however, ancient world views are outdated and moral precepts should be adapted to modern problems.

Of course, there is also the "danger" that many a dogma could be shaken. In the Middle Ages, these dogmas were defended with fire and sword. It must have been worth about 30 million human lives to the Roman Catholic Church to defend "its" doctrines—and the claims to power that went along with them. Wars, crusades, witch trials, the Inquisition, and incitement of the people against those of other faiths led to an extremely bloody church history.

In the late modern era, church doctrine is no longer defended with fire and flame, but with paper and pen. Instead of millions of dead people, there are now millions of people who are taken into psychological hostage. Bad conscience is an excellent means of manipulating people. In the long run, however, this strategy leads to mental illness and a sick society. Physical violence has turned into psychological violence in our society. But with this, the suffering of people has mutated from a "finite" misery to a "never-ending" misery. Divorced people, gays and lesbians, criminals or mentally ill people have no place anymore in many ecclesiastical societies (Christian Church). And yet, nature has provided for deviations from the norm, probably with a purpose.

As a physician who comes from a Catholic-influenced culture, I will refer only to the Bible in the following book. No attempt will be made to check the historical sources for their "correctness". That should be left to the historians. I will only try to "explain" single biblical texts from the point of view of a medical doctor. Thereby, as I said, I don't claim that the presented views are the only correct ones. Rather, they should stimulate discussion, discussions that are necessary to create a more contemporary reorganization, in order to give faith communities back the meaning they have had up to now and are increasingly losing in the modern age. Churches and faith communities would be more important than ever, especially in the present age, as guiding institutions for moral behaviour. However, the churches are no longer performing their actual tasks adequately. This is another reason why I have decided to cause a bit of trouble here with my interpretations, in the hope that by breaking up old thought structures, more space will be created again for modern, truly Christian thinking.

My special thanks go to my friends and discussion partners who contributed many ideas and helped me to write this book. In particular, I would like to thank J. G. Landers and Dorothy Butters, who provided a lot of constructive criticism and helped me with the translation into English.



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# Chapter 1

## The Miracles in the New Testament



### 1.1 The Miracle of the Resurrection (The Execution of Jesus, Passion, Crucifixion and “Resurrection”)

Some time between the year 30 and 36 AD, a man died whose death would change the world. Actually, it was not his death on the cross that caused such a stir, but the fact that he rose again from the dead three days after his execution. At least that’s how the Bible tells it, and that’s how about a billion people who call themselves Christians still believe it today. The very fact that someone could regain life by his own power after his execution represented something divine. In any case, the resurrection of Jesus Christ is one of the most important miracles in Christian doctrine. No other miracle is considered as important for believing Christians as the resurrection of Christ.

In contrast, there are some Non-Christians who believe that Christ did not really die on the cross, that he was only in suspended animation, and therefore could survive.<sup>1</sup> Yes, even resuscitation has been thought of, but this is very unlikely, since reanimation was not known until modern times and was certainly not practised in antiquity.

What really took place at the crucifixion site of Golgotha? At the place where Christ was crucified together with two other criminals? Is there any evidence in the Bible that could point to a survival of Jesus Christ? Clues that could explain the resurrection of Jesus Christ in a very simple way? The Gospel of John provides an amazingly accurate description of the passion of Jesus Christ. From his condemnation by Pontius Pilate, his torture by Roman soldiers, his journey to the execution site of

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<sup>1</sup> Der Kreuzigungsbericht des Markusevangeliums Mk 15,20b–41. Johannes Schreiber, Walter de Gruyter-Verlag, Berlin 1986; [books.google.at/books?hl=de&lr=&id=xZZsDwAAQBAJ&oi=fnd&pg=PR7&dq=Brandt+L+Scheintod+2016&ots=8NcFIZm9Bs&sig=9oGIRGVNvH02WaZRvGQ3PpfsKsQ#v=onepage&q&f=false](https://books.google.at/books?hl=de&lr=&id=xZZsDwAAQBAJ&oi=fnd&pg=PR7&dq=Brandt+L+Scheintod+2016&ots=8NcFIZm9Bs&sig=9oGIRGVNvH02WaZRvGQ3PpfsKsQ#v=onepage&q&f=false).

Golgotha, his crucifixion, and finally his burial. The descriptions are so exact that one can suspect one or the other damage to the tortured body on the basis of the described symptoms.

### ***1.1.1 Blood Sweat, Jesus Sweats Blood***

#### **1.1.1.1 Original Text (Luke 22:39–46)**

**Jesus Prays on the Mount of Olives:** 39 And he came out and went, as was his custom, to the Mount of Olives, and the disciples followed him. 40 And when he came to the place, he said to them, “Pray that you may not enter into temptation.” 41 And he withdrew from them about a stone’s throw, and knelt down and prayed, 42 saying, “Father, if you are willing, remove this cup from me. Nevertheless, not my will, but yours, be done.” 43 And there appeared to him an angel from heaven, strengthening him. 44 And being in agony he prayed more earnestly; and his sweat became like great drops of blood falling down to the ground. 45 And when he rose from prayer, he came to the disciples and found them sleeping for sorrow, 46 and he said to them, “Why are you sleeping? Rise and pray that you may not enter into temptation.”

#### **1.1.1.2 Description and Interpretation**

Jesus had already allowed himself so many provocations that he was no longer acceptable to the high priests and the representatives of the Jewish religious community of that time. As a revolutionary preacher, Jesus was also a thorn in the side of the Roman occupying power. So it was easy for the Jewish elite, together with the Roman occupiers, to eliminate the hated itinerant preacher. They accused him and demanded his death. Jesus and his disciples were well aware of the approaching danger. So it came to the “last” supper, in which he said goodbye to his followers, so to speak. Afterwards, he still went with his disciples to the Mount of Olives for a final prayer, for Jesus was all too aware that he was about to be handed over to the Roman governor. Somewhat apart from his disciples, he gave free rein to his fear, praying to his God, seeing that his capture would only be a matter of time.

In this situation of enormous fear of death, sweat stood on his forehead. But not only that. The fear was so pronounced that he even had hallucinations and saw an angel. He prayed that he might be spared the foreseeable torments. But unfortunately without success, as the further story in the Bible tells us.

When he returned to his disciples, he saw with disappointment that they had fallen asleep. But the disciples noticed that the beads of sweat on his forehead were stained red. “Jesus was sweating blood” (Luke 22:44). This image has been put on canvas countless times by artists and represents well the human side of the Son of God. In the course of time, this image has even found its way into language when, in cases of extreme fear, one speaks of “someone sweating blood from fear.”