

# THE TRINITY REVIEW

For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh, for the weapons of our warfare [are] not fleshly but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds, casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ. And they will be ready to punish all disobedience, when your obedience is fulfilled.

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## Counterfeit Miracles

John W. Robbins

Editor's note: This is the Foreword (edited for space) to the new edition of Benjamin Warfield's 1918 lectures on *Counterfeit Miracles*, to be released by The Trinity Foundation in June. As the United States becomes more religious, it becomes more superstitious; it is rediscovering and reinventing full-blown heathen religion – signs and wonders, priests, shrines, meditation, "spiritual formation," "incarnational worship," spiritual communities, healings, asceticism, monasticism, ecstatic "speech." Warfield's explanation of Biblical miracles and his dissection of modern heathenism are more timely today than they were 90 years ago. If you would like a copy of *Counterfeit Miracles* (300-plus pages, fully annotated and indexed), the U. S. postpaid price is \$20.

Despite the growing interest in religion, most churchgoers in America – perhaps most churchgoers worldwide – seem never to have read the Bible. That in itself is a damning indictment of contemporary churches. Suppose a literary club were organized to study Shakespeare, but read only snippets from his plays and a few sonnets, and spent most of its meetings doing other things. Would we call it a Shakespearean society? Hardly. Yet churches that claim to be Christian have not taught their members even the most basic things about Christianity. Most of them, in fact, depreciate the truthfulness and importance of Scripture, and instead emphasize religious ritual; social, charitable, and political activity; and emotional experience. It's as if the Shakespeare society ignored Shakespeare and spent its time bowling. Churches neither encourage nor practice the intellectual experience of studying the Word of God. That, if it is to be done at all, is to be done only by the experts – the academicians in seminaries and universities.

There is a nasty motive for this inculcated ignorance of the Bible, a motive that is never mentioned in theological discussions, because it has a nasty name: powerlust. The last thing false teachers in the churches want is a Biblically-informed membership. People who study the Bible and think for themselves, as Jesus commanded (*Luke 12:57*), are impossible to manipulate and control.

What church leaders (and they are leaders – *Führers* – not church officers) want is members who will follow them blindly. And they have succeeded. Members fund and obey their leaders because they have no objective standard of truth by which to judge them. In fact, church leaders tell church members it is sinful to judge anyone, and especially sinful to judge "God's anointed." Members should be making faith promises and writing checks.

The false teaching church leaders use to accomplish this result is the profoundly anti-intellectual philosophy that pervades contemporary religion and churches: This philosophy says religion is a matter of the heart, not the head; a matter of how one lives, not how one thinks. Christianity is orthopraxy, not orthodoxy; it is life, not theory. The desired result of this teaching is an abysmal ignorance among churchgoers of even the most elementary truths of Scripture. Perhaps some churchgoers have read passages of Scripture as "devotions"; perhaps a few have even read entire books of the Bible; but the churchgoer who has read the Bible from cover to cover is rare. And the churchgoer who understands what he reads, and believes it, is almost extinct.

The results of this vast ignorance (and therefore vast unbelief) are all around us. The zealous atheist Sam Harris, a gullible man who apparently believes every opinion poll he reads, informs us that 80 percent of the American people believe the Bible is the inspired and inerrant Word of God. The statement is ludicrous. Eighty percent is 240 million Americans. It is an exaggeration to say that even eight percent of the American people believe the Bible is inspired and inerrant. Twenty-four million Bible-believing Christians, the salt of the Earth, would transform American society. But American society has not been transformed, at least not for the better. Instead, American civilization is rapidly disappearing. The churches and people Harris describes as true believers are actually true apostates, having more in common with Harris' worldly philosophy than with the Bible's teachings.

Because American churches are led by false teachers and filled with unbelievers, the society of which they form a

part is rapidly losing all the characteristics of a civilized society. The rapid growth of both crime and government (that is, both individual and political lawlessness) are two leading indicators of a civilization in collapse. The radical Muslims have one thing right: The United States is a decadent nation. Those who deny our decadence are fooling only themselves. The lawlessness of churches that profess to be Christian appears in their admitting homosexuals to membership and ordaining them to office; sponsoring gambling; supporting abortion and terrorism; inculcating false doctrine; and ritually eating what they solemnly state is the physical body and blood of Jesus.

This self-professed ritual cannibalism (there is no more accurate word to describe what the Roman Catholic Church admits is its principal sacrament), practiced by the Roman Catholic Church-State – more than one billion professed Christians – is the result of another Antichristian belief: Divine miracles have never ceased, and they continue to occur in the twenty-first century. In fact, the Roman Church-State claims to have institutionalized miracles: At every Mass, the priest miraculously changes the bread and wine into the divine and physical body and blood of Jesus Christ so that devout Catholics may eat and drink them. (Catholics are saved from Hell by a personal relationship and union with Christ in the wafer and wine.) The Roman priest merely has to speak the formula – “Hoc est corpus meum” – “This is my body” – and the wafer miraculously becomes the literal body of Jesus Christ.

Such beliefs and practices are indistinguishable from ritual magic, and such miracles and magic were characteristic of ancient pagan societies. (The phrase “hocus-pocus,” used in amateur theatrical magic, derives from the Latin “hoc est” of the Catholic ritual.) According to the Roman Catholic historian Carlos M. N. Eire of Yale University, the consecrated host, itself a miracle, became the worker of many miracles in the middle ages:

The laity crowded to see the host and ascribed all sorts of miracles to it... The host bled, levitated, transfigured itself into the likeness of Christ, protected itself from impious hands, and sometimes even controlled the elements.<sup>1</sup>

Ancient pagan societies (and some modern animistic cultures) had miraculous healings, shamans, healing priests, temples and rituals, ecstatic speech (now called “tongues”), apparitions, and virtually every sort of miracle known to the medieval and modern Roman Church-State.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *War Against the Idols: The Reformation of Worship from Erasmus to Calvin*. Cambridge University Press, 1986.

<sup>2</sup> To better understand the religions of Greece and Rome, see *Paganism and Christianity 100-425 C.E.* by Ramsay MacMullen and Eugene Lane (Fortress Press, 1992); *Survivals of Roman Religion* by Gordon J. Laing (Cooper Square Publishers, 1963); *The Religious Life of Ancient Rome* by Jesse Carter (Cooper Square Publishers [1911] 1972); *The World of Late Antiquity* by Peter Brown (W. W. Norton, 1971); *The Oxford History of the Classical World* by Boardman, Griffin, and Murray (Oxford University Press, 1986), and, of course, the works of M. I. Finley.

Most churchgoers do not know this history, nor do they realize that the Bible teaches that demons can perform miracles. In the twentieth century, both government and parochial schools deliberately miseducated their students about the religiosity of ancient civilizations such as Egypt, Greece, and Rome: The humanists wanted to propagate the myth of rational, tolerant pagan societies, because they wanted to claim that the peace and freedom enjoyed by Americans were due to the influence of Greece and Rome, not the Bible. The Romanists, wanting to claim that Roman Catholic miracles were unique and divine, obscured the religion and miracles of the pagan societies from which the Roman Church-State adopted its religion and practices. Neither the humanists who ran the government schools nor the Romanists who ran the parochial schools taught the Bible to their students. Rather, both perverted the teaching of Scripture in their classrooms for their own evil reasons.

The Roman Church-State adopted miraculous paganism from ancient society, sprinkled it with holy water (another pagan idea), and passed it off as Christian. The result is described by Roman Catholic historian Carlos Eire:

In 1509, when John Calvin was born, Western Christendom still shared a common religion of immanence. Heaven was never too far from Earth. The sacred was diffused in the profane, the spiritual in the material. Divine power, embodied in the Church and its sacraments, reached down through innumerable points of contact to make itself felt: to forgive and to punish, to protect against the ravages of nature, to heal, to soothe, and to work all sorts of wonders. Priests could absolve adulterers and murderers, or bless fields and cattle. During their lives, saints could prevent lightning from striking, restore sight to the blind, or preach to birds and fish. Unencumbered by the limitations of time and space, they could do even more through their images and relics after death. A pious glance at a statue of St. Christopher in the morning ensured protection from illness and death throughout the day. Burial in the habit of St. Francis improved the prospects for the afterlife. Pilgrimage to Santiago, where the body of the apostle James had been deposited by angels, or to Canterbury, where St. Thomas à Becket had had his skull split open by knights of King Henry II, could make a lame man walk, or hasten a soul's release from purgatory. The map of Europe bristled with holy places; life pulsed with the expectation of the miraculous. In the popular mind and in much of the official teaching of the Church, almost anything was possible. One could even eat the flesh of the risen Christ in a consecrated wafer [*Idols*, 1].

The adoption of pagan religious practices by the Roman Church-State is the principal reason for the survival of belief in the miraculous in so-called Christian countries in the twenty-first century. Worse, because the Roman Church-State has repackaged these pagan wonders as Christian and divine, those who believe that contemporary miracles are divine think that those who do not believe are

not Christian. The Roman-Church State requires its subjects to believe that its priests perform miracles. It encourages its subjects to believe that the relics of the saints and apparitions perform miracles. Millions of Catholics, Protestants, and others flock to so-called holy places where paintings cry, statues bleed, and apparitions appear. Televangelists, whose doctrine of salvation is essentially Roman Catholic, perform miracles according to their broadcast schedules, and local church charlatans throughout the world try to imitate them. Like medieval Europe, the modern world is suffused with superstition and the miraculous, and it is worsening. Materialism and miracles are merging once again, just as they did in the middle ages. Should Christ not return soon, should there be no second Reformation in the twenty-first century, the world will fall off the precipice into a new, global, Dark Age.

Eire recognized and reported one of the effects of the Christian Reformation of the sixteenth century:

By the late fifteenth century, life was so saturated with religion that the people of Western Europe ran the risk of confusing the spiritual and the temporal, the sacred and the profane, It was a religion that seemed most interested in tapping supernatural power... [M]uch of late medieval religion was magical, and...the difference between churchmen and magicians lay less in what they claimed they could do than in the authority on which their claims rested [*Idols*, 11].

Fourteen years later [1523], as Calvin began his studies at the University of Paris, it was no longer possible to take this intermingling of spiritual and material for granted. Among the many changes brought about by the Reformation, none was more visible, or tangible, where it triumphed, than the abolition of this kind of religion...[*Idols*, 1].

The preaching of the Gospel by Luther and the other early Reformers transformed Europe. It freed believers from Roman Catholic religion, superstitions, and tyranny. It encouraged education, science, letters, art, and business. It began the separation of church and state and the growth of capitalism. But it did not end religious superstition; the idols are always with us. The religious skepticism inculcated by the Bible and taught by the Reformers has been replaced by religious gullibility. Churchgoers, being ignorant of the Bible, confuse that religious gullibility with faith. But Christian faith is not gullibility; it is, in fact, a shield against gullibility.

Scripture repeatedly commands Christians to be skeptical of religious claims; many churchgoers do not realize how many warnings there are in Scripture about false teachers:

But the prophet who presumes to speak a word in my name, which I have not commanded him to speak, or who speaks in the name of other gods, that prophet shall die. And if you say in your heart, How shall we know the word which the Lord has not spoken, when a prophet speaks in the name of the Lord, if the thing does not happen or come to pass, that *is* the thing

which the Lord has not spoken; the prophet has spoken it presumptuously: You shall not be afraid of him [*Deuteronomy* 18:20-22].

When he speaks kindly, do not believe him, for there are seven abominations in his heart [*Proverbs* 26:25].

Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravenous wolves [*Matthew* 7:15].

Take heed that no one deceives you. For many will come in my [Jesus'] name, saying, "I am the Christ," and will deceive many.... Then many false prophets will rise up and deceive many.... Then if anyone says to you, "Look, here is the Christ!" or, "There!" Do not believe it. For false christs and false prophets will rise and show great signs and wonders to deceive, if possible, even the elect. See, I have told you beforehand. Therefore, if they say to you, "Look, he is in the desert!" Do not go out. Or, "Look, he is in the inner rooms!" Do not believe it [*Matthew* 24].

If I [Jesus] do not do the works of my Father, do not believe me [*John* 10:37].

Such are false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into apostles of Christ. And no wonder! For Satan himself transforms himself into an angel of light. Therefore, it is no great thing if his ministers also transform themselves into ministers of righteousness, whose end will be according to their works [*2 Corinthians* 11:13-15].

Now I [Paul] say thus lest anyone should deceive you with persuasive words.... Beware lest anyone cheat you through philosophy and empty deceit, according to the tradition of men, according to the basic principles of the world, and not according to Christ [*Colossians* 2:4, 8].

Test all things; hold fast what is good [*1 Thessalonians* 5:21].

But there were also false prophets among the people, just as there will be false teachers among you, who will secretly introduce destructive heresies, even denying the Lord who bought them, and bring on themselves swift destruction. And many will follow their destructive ways, because of whom the way of truth will be blasphemed [*2 Peter* 2:1-2].

Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits, whether they are of God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world [*1 John* 4:1].

This skepticism was and is necessary because there are many imposters, false teachers, and false religions. In fact, all religions are false except one. The humanist philosophers who have said that religions have deleterious effects on society have a point: Non-Christian religions are in fact harmful – now and forever. They are not to be believed. When Paul arrived in Athens, he was impressed with the vibrant, pulsating religiosity of the city. The public square of Athens was not naked, as it should have been, but was filled with idols:

Now while Paul waited for them [Silas and Timothy] at Athens, his spirit was provoked within him when he saw that the city was given over to idols. Therefore he reasoned in the synagogue with the Jews and with the Gentile worshipers, and in the marketplace daily with those who happened to be there.... Then Paul stood in the midst of the Areopagus and said, "Men of Athens, I perceive that in all things you are very religious, for as I was passing through and considering the objects of your worship, I even found an altar with this inscription: To the Unknown God" [Acts 17:16-23].

Ancient Greek and Roman society, to say nothing of the Egyptians and Babylonians, like all Roman Catholic societies, medieval and modern, was very religious, and given over to idolatry. The Christians, because of their religious skepticism, which was a logical result of their belief in only one God, only one mediator, Jesus Christ, and only one revelation, the Bible, were persecuted by Jews, pagans, and Romanists because of their refusal to believe their non-Christian religions. The beginnings of that persecution of Christians are recounted in *Acts*:

Peter and John: Now as they [Peter and John] spoke to the people, the priests, the captain of the Temple, and the Sadducees came upon them, being greatly disturbed that they taught the people and preached in Jesus the resurrection from the dead. And they laid hands on them and put them in custody until the next day, for it was already evening [Acts 4:1-3].

Stephen: They [the unbelieving Jews] were not able to resist the wisdom and the Spirit by which he [Stephen] spoke. Then they secretly induced men to say, We have heard him speak blasphemous words against Moses and God. And they stirred up the people, the elders, and the scribes, and they came upon him, seized him, and brought him to the Council. They also set up false witnesses who said, This man does not cease to speak blasphemous words against this holy place and the law; for we have heard him say that this Jesus of Nazareth will destroy this place and change the customs which Moses delivered to us.... Then they cried out with a loud voice, stopped their ears, and ran at him with one accord, and they cast him out of the city and stoned him [Acts 6:10-7:60].

Paul: Immediately he [Paul] preached the Christ in the synagogues, that he is the Son of God. Then all who heard were amazed, and said, Is this not he who destroyed those who called on this name in Jerusalem, and has come here for that purpose, so that he might bring them bound to the chief priests? But Saul increased all the more in strength and confounded the Jews who dwelt in Damascus, proving that this Jesus is the Christ. Now after many days were past, the Jews plotted to kill him. But their plot became known to Saul. And they watched the gates day and night to kill him. Then the disciples took him by night and let him down through the wall in large basket [Acts 9:20-25].

Also many of those who had practiced magic brought their books together and burned them in the sight of all. And they counted up the value of them, and it totaled fifty thousand pieces of silver. So the Word of the Lord grew mightily and prevailed. ... And about that time there arose a great commotion about the way. For a certain man named Demetrius, a silversmith, who made silver shrines of Diana, brought no small profit to the craftsmen. He called them together with the workers of similar occupation, and said, Men you know that we have our prosperity by this trade. Moreover, you see and hear that not only at Ephesus, but throughout almost all Asia, this Paul has persuaded and turned away many people, saying they are not gods which are made with hands. So not only is this trade of ours in danger of falling into disrepute, but also the temple of the great goddess Diana may be despised and her magnificence destroyed, whom all Asia and the world worship. Now when they heard this, they were full of wrath and cried out, saying, Great is Diana of the Ephesians! So the whole city was filled with confusion and rushed into the theater with one accord, having seized Gaius and Aristarchus, Macedonians, Paul's travel companions. And when Paul wanted to go in to the people, the disciples would not allow him [Acts 19:19-30].

When 86 year old Polycarp was arrested by the Romans, he refused to offer the sacrifices to the gods of the Romans. Then his confession was read aloud three times: "Polycarp has confessed that he is a Christian." Immediately the assembled mob of pagans and Jews cried out: "This is the teacher of Asia. The father of the Christians, and the overthrower of our gods, he who has been teaching many not to sacrifice, or to worship the gods." Polycarp was legally murdered for his opinions about Roman gods: He refused to worship them. His religious skepticism cost him his life.

This book is based on a series of lectures on counterfeit miracles that Warfield delivered at Union Seminary in South Carolina in 1918. Warfield, one of the most accomplished theologians of the twentieth century, professor at Princeton Seminary, and prolific systematic theologian, expresses once again the skepticism commanded by Christ. There are demonic miracles in the modern world; there are unscrupulous impostors; there are weak-minded and gullible churchgoers; there is the power of suggestion; but there are no divine miracles. Divine miracles had a specific purpose, and when that purpose was accomplished, divine miracles ceased. The present fascination with miracles, no longer restricted to the superstitions of the Roman Catholic Church-State, but now spread throughout the world by the Pentecostal and Charismatic movements, is not a sign of resurgent Christianity, as many have said, but a sign of resurgent paganism. The sort of religion that pervaded ancient Rome and medieval Rome has returned, just as, and because, Christianity is fading from the modern mind.