Do Miracles Still Happen? Essay, Research Paper

When bringing the existence of miracles into question it is necessary to firstly establish a definition of a miracle and exactly what purpose they serve. As with many issues, theologians are divided on an actual definition of what a miracle really is. Paul Tillich (1886-1965) claimed that:

“A genuine miracle is first of all an event which is astonishing, unusual,

Shaking without contradicting the rational structure of reality.

In the second place it is an event which points to the mystery of being,

expressing its relation to us in a definite way.” However, some interpret miracles as simply “a series of myths” (David Friedrich Struass).

There is, however, no doubt that with miracles comes “an awareness of God”, as they must always involve faith. The subject of miracles can often be the deciding point as to whether people believe in God or not. It must be noted that although many believers in God may be predisposed to believe in miracles, non-believers in God can also be predisposed against miracles, therefore it is recommended that a balance between a “superstitious understanding” and a “mechanical scientific outlook” must be achieved in order to diminish any possibility of bias. One point of view is that miracles “possess evidential value”, miracles such as the resurrection of Christ (John 20) and the miracles performed by Moses in Exodus 7-11. It is thought that these miracles provide the evidence needed to prove that God is “at work” within the world. Another point of view would be that the significance of the miracle is not based on the actual event itself, but on its meaning. The actual story and the events within it take second place to the primary fact that a “miracle story” shows that “God directs and intervenes in human history”. Through this interpretation of miracles it is a form of confirmation for believers of Gods existence and the fact that He is watching over them. Theistic religions often face a great challenge in the modern world as they must deal with the “rise of modern science” and also acknowledge the “inconsistencies and errors” within the Bible, whilst struggling to “integrate a belief in miracles, divine purpose”.

David Hume (1711-1776), although never declaring himself an atheist, was quite sceptical of miracles and attacked them in his Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding (1748). The cynical Hume lived during the ‘scientific revolution´, often called the “Age of Reason”, as everything had to have a reason and explanation due to new found knowledge of medicines and the workings of the body, and also as a result of Newton´s discovery of the laws of Physics. It seemed that during this century magic and imagination was dead and belief in God was beginning to falter. Belief in Deism was becoming increasingly popular, whereby God put the world together as a complicated machine and then does not intervene and allows it to continue by itself. Hume claimed that a miracle was a “violation of the laws of nature” and that the very definition and also nature seems to exclude all possibilities of a miracle; an event can only be classed as a miracle if it is an event which is impossible, otherwise it would not “merit that appellation”. Hume systematically denied the existence of miracles through different arguments, claiming that no miracle was “attested by a sufficient number of men” and that those who did claim to have seen miracles originate from “ignorant and barbaric nations”. Hume discredited all people that had claimed to have witnessed miracles. Through this argument some may argue that Hume proved his own ignorance and also showed his own predisposition against miracles. Hume´s claim that miracles were simply “religious propaganda” and were simply developed to “over throw every other system” is extremely narrow-minded, as miracles have been proven to strengthen faith and exist as more of an attraction to those who believe, as opposed to propaganda. It is claimed by some that “we know from Hume that we can not know”, as his arguments being both logical and never “successfully refuted” can also not be proved.

When questioning Biblical miracles Hume claimed that they were impossible events and therefore did not happen as there is no way to prove their existence. However, many claim that it is here that Hume misunderstands the Biblical miracle, as they were not intended as events which could be performed for a second time, they were events which must have been performed by someone special, such as Christ. In the Bible, the word ‘miracle´ translates to mean ‘sign´ or ‘wonder´, originating from the Greek word ‘miraculum´. Hume should have known that by definition, a miracle couldn´t be tested or reproduced.

As with many of the issues faced within the modern world the existence of miracles will always be questionable, usually depending upon the beliefs of the person who is answering. Those who believe in God see 87% of all miracles reported, however, there still remains 13% of miracles that are seen by those who do not believe in a God, as such. Therefore the existence of miracles in this century, or any for that matter will never be wholly determined until either some form of proving them is developed, which could possibly result in the death of miracles, or until the human race becomes more open to the idea of a supernatural force at work within the universe.