

Summary of Text 37: *Miracle 71: An Alternative*

Background and structure

The text is a long essay on the VRT documentary *Miracle No. 71* (2023) by Lieve Blancquaert and Nathalie Basteyns, winner of the Prix Europa 2023. In three episodes – *hope, faith, love* – the series follows Nathalie, who suffers from multiple sclerosis and travels by convertible from Belgium to Lourdes together with photographer Lieve and nurse Gustave, in the hope of a miraculous healing: the seventy-first miracle. We transcribed the dialogues and built thirteen chapters around them, each starting from a striking statement.

Religion and science

Religion is defined as grasping a problem of life and seeking a solution, with prayer for help from higher beings at its core. The sacred is described as "increased charge of power": a vital force that is the true driving force behind all religion. Lieve, however, is highly skeptical about miracles. Such skepticism and the principled denial of miracles – as with Renan, who takes this as an axiom – would require all testimonies concerning them to be untrue. Moreover, a science that claims to encompass the whole of reality changes from a method into an ideology. We therefore divide reality into three levels: nature, the preternatural (the paranormal), and the supernatural (the Biblical God). Science is limited to the domain of nature and can assert its authority only there.

Paranormal forces

Nathalie's intuition tells her that "there must be something". Numerous testimonies from occult literature support this: the Russian medium Nina Kulagina, who is said to have stopped a frog's heart from a distance; thought-forms that become manifest, such as Dion Fortune's revenge demon (a wolf) and Alexandra David-Neel's tulpa monk; the medium of Endor who summoned the dead, as described in the Bible; out-of-body experiences; materializations of the dead (Mrs. Schwarz in Kübler-Ross, and the ghostly hitchhiker of Alba-la-Romaine); nature spirits, elves, and the contact people in Findhorn are said to have with plant spirits. All of this falls under the heading of "hylic pluralism": the age-old belief in several kinds of subtle matter, with the aura and the subtle body serving as the human vehicle.

Pagan religions

Seventeen "samples" from Biblical and non-Biblical religions are reviewed, including King David and Abishag, Santería, Macumba, Vodou, the African python priestess Twadekili, Sai Baba, the Tibetan pokto who cuts open her

abdomen and, in that state, gives advice and performs healings, the Kumari of Nepal, and the Daijōsai ritual of the Japanese Emperor Akihito.

The common feature of all these samples is sacrificial magic, *do ut des*: I give you, deity, energy (through offerings, sexuality, blood), and you solve my problem. Some of these gods are fickle and morally unreliable; one speaks of "the harmony of opposites". At one time the non-Biblical gods bring about good, at another evil. They do not possess a conscience in the way we understand it. Crucial is the contrast with Christianity: pagan healings would heal only the "personality" (the present life), not the "individuality" (the soul across many lives). Hence the chapter on reincarnation, with the compelling testimony of the case of Shanti Devi, and the conclusion that miracles are possible.

Jesus and the supernatural

Christianity is situated in the supernatural, with the Holy Trinity as the source of all vital force. Jesus' healings are processes with magical overtones: laying on of hands, saliva, and repeated interventions (the blind man of Bethsaida who first sees "people like trees", and after further treatment by Jesus sees them as they really are). This gradual process contrasts with the strict criteria for miracles at Lourdes (sudden, immediate, permanent) and calls those criteria into question. The secularization of the Church becomes more pronounced from the Enlightenment onwards: whoever neglects the paranormal loses "the salt's power" (Matthew 5:13). Jesus' miracles and forgiveness ("your sins are forgiven") lead to the healing of the deeper soul, with Jesus taking evil upon himself – in contrast to pagan magic, which merely displaces evil.

Theodicy and modernity

We answer Nathalie's question, "Why does God make me ill?", through a critique of Epicurus's denial of God. According to the author, the Flemish thinker Etienne Vermeersch unfortunately followed Epicurus in this respect. The argument is valid only if God created automatons. Because He created beings with free will and gave them a moral law – the Biblical Decalogue – the cause of evil lies in the misuse of that free will, not in God himself.

The "masters of religious doubt" then pass in review (Comte, Marx, Nietzsche, Freud): they explain religion from the standpoint of their own presuppositions, but they cannot refute the paranormal.

Objectively speaking, chance does not exist either: whoever knew all the data – including the paranormal – would see necessity. A purely materialistic worldview therefore fails to do justice to the whole of reality.

Prayer, guilt and judgement

At the center is Trinitarian prayer, prayer to the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit: to pray is to receive vital force from God. Thoughts are active forces of subtle matter. Here too, quantitative increase leads to qualitative leaps, just as ice can become water and water can be transformed into steam. Likewise, repeated, concentrated prayers can build up thought-forms, mobilize nature spirits and lead to healing leaps. Even if that transformation is not achieved in the present life, the subtle, deeper soul of that person possesses an increased charge that continues to work out in his or her further evolution.

In the story of Sofie, a retired religious education teacher, a clairvoyant priest explains her temporary illness as an excessively rapid adjustment to the increased energy resulting from suddenly praying a great deal and with great intensity.

We also consider the "judgement of God". Unresolved and as yet unatoned-for faults from previous lives can affect present health. Genuine healing requires repentance, reparation and forgiveness – including forgiveness by the victim.

We can raise serious questions about missionary activity that eradicates pagan religions instead of accepting, purifying and elevating them. As a result, many peoples have once again sought salvation in their ancient traditions.

Lourdes critically examined

In the chapter on commercialization, Lourdes itself comes under scrutiny. Drawing on studies of vampirism (Ambelain), we question the "incorruptible" bodies of saints (Francis Xavier, Teresa of Ávila, Bernadette Soubirous) and stigmatization (Padre Pio): according to the occult literature cited, such phenomena may be connected with the theft of subtle energy rather than necessarily being evidence of holiness. Sensitives claim to feel unwell in the grotto of Massabielle; the apparition to Bernadette may therefore possibly have been a preternatural rather than a supernatural phenomenon.

As an "alternative", we point to simple, energetic places such as old chapels and churches that have been charged for centuries by the prayers of devout pilgrims, or to benevolently radiating icons such as Rublev's Trinity icon.

Suffering and hope

The poet Mustafa Kör, himself paralyzed, teaches Nathalie acceptance: not cherishing an "all-consuming paralyzed sorrow". According to Kübler-Ross, suffering can make spiritual growth possible; this is illustrated by the letter of the African soldier Bombo, who, as a blind, handless war veteran, considers everything "good" with great joy in life. The text also emphasizes service, compassion and love for the whole of creation, particularly for people who suffer.

In the fictional closing story, the neighbor Kamiel paints an autumn leaf on the whitewashed wall beside the grapevine of the sick Nele. Nele thinks that the last leaf will endure and thereby finds new courage to live; her health gradually improves. The story is intended to illustrate that hope, alongside its psychological effect, also mobilizes subtle forces.

The documentary's final images, showing Nathalie digitally "healed" and standing upright, suggest that the journey did not achieve its goal, namely healing. One may raise questions about this. Nathalie has nevertheless undergone a profound evolution in her deeper soul. Her philosophical and religious thinking has led, and continues to lead, to a Trinitarian religion with immense healing power. Biblical religion can be described as wisdom descending for the healing of the peoples.

The final part of the text contains another prayer, with an appeal to reflect on the whole text as information, not as indoctrination. Ultimately, it is Jesus himself who enters into the innermost part of the human being and can make him or her feel who they truly are and what they accomplish.

Conclusion

This text defends supernatural, Biblical insights against scientific reductionism. Pagan religions and their magic also "work", but on a preternatural and morally fickle level.

We conclude that only the Biblical God, who needs no sacrifices, grants healing in any case. Trinitarian prayer will promote protection, spiritual growth and healing; the absence of physical healing does not mean, however, that all efforts are in vain – even then, spiritual progress has been achieved.

At the same time, the text warns against passing judgement oneself on the hidden cause of another person's illness or on that person's supposed guilt in

the matter. Reality is infinitely complex, and what appears similar is sometimes deceptively different.