

Signs and Wonders

Do you believe God exists? Why?

There are many reasons people believe in God. Some base their beliefs on the teaching of Scripture, or perhaps on role models and people they admire.

Some say they've been convinced by the Holy Spirit of His presence in their lives. Others had an emotional experience or even saw something amazing that led them to believe God is real.

The Holy Spirit is at work in the world, but we need to ensure that the spirit we choose to listen to is in fact the Spirit of God. While supernatural signs and wonders have drawn many to God—including Saul, who became Paul, the world's most famous missionary—we must be careful not to be guided exclusively by circumstances and emotions. In fact, Hebrews 11:1 tells us that faith is the evidence of what we do not see. As humans, what we can see is never the whole picture.

When Jesus was on Earth, He performed many supernatural miracles and signs. But even then, many people still didn't believe He was God (John 12:37). In Matthew 12, we read of some of the Jewish religious leaders who ask Jesus for a sign from heaven. Jesus responds by telling them, "An evil and adulterous generation seeketh after a sign" (Matthew 12:39).

Later He tells the Jews through a parable that if the ancient law and prophecies He had given them could not convince them, neither could a miraculous sign (Luke 16:19-31).

While Christ obviously has the power to perform signs, miracles are not where we should be putting our trust.

Deception—the Order of the Day

Christ also taught about the coming destruction at the end of time. The disciples asked Him, "When shall these things be? And what shall be the sign of thy coming and of the end of the world." The first thing Jesus told them was, "Take heed that no man deceive you" (Matthew 24:3-4) to show us that deception would mark the closing years of this Earth's history.

We are indeed seeing these deceptive signs today, another indicator that we are living in the end time.

The symbolism in Revelation 16:13 tells us that demonic spirits are deceiving the world. God is all-powerful and is able to perform more supernatural signs and wonders than we can imagine. However, we must guard ourselves against these evil spirits that are trying to imitate God's power in order to snatch us away from His truth.

The second thing Jesus told His disciples was that many would come claiming to be Christ. In fact, Jesus tells us that their deceptions would be so strong, that if it were possible, they would even deceive "the very elect" (Matthew 24:24).

The elect are those who make the Word of God their basis for faith—those who cling to the Reformation's central belief: *Sola Scriptura*. The elect want to follow God and love the truth.

From Jesus' words, we know that deception will be rampant during our times. What sort of deception should we be looking for?

Supernatural Deceptions

In Matthew 24:24, Jesus tells us that in the end times, Satan's deceptions will be rampant in an attempt to deceive everyone—even God's elect people. One way Satan tries to deceive us is to counterfeit God's wonder-working power.

In the last century, signs and wonders have appeared more and more in connection with the Catholic Church.

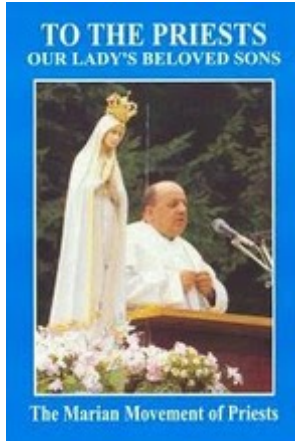
The Catholic belief that Mary is the queen of heaven and mediator between us and Christ has been bolstered recently by apparitions of Mary appearing around the world. She has become a key figure to be worshiped.

Catholics have experienced all kinds of strange occurrences, but this should not be surprising, considering the Catholic statement that apparitions are more important than theology:

*The theologian Karl Rahner has pointed out that **we are moved much more readily and effectively** by those divine interventions that we call **apparitions** than by **abstract teachings of knowledgeable theologians** or the hierarchy of the Church (emphasis added).ⁱ*

Some of the miracles occurring in Catholicism seem very similar to the experiences of New Age mystics.

In 1973, for example, Catholic Father Stefano Gobbi received over 600 dictated messages that he wrote down. He published them in a book entitled *To the Priests, our Lady's Beloved Sons*.



In the book, he urges priests to be faithful to the Pope and to render “total obedience to his commands,” “ready to fight even to the shedding of their blood in order to remain united to him.”ⁱⁱ

The New Age and Catholicism should have nothing in common, but in reality the lines have always been blurred. Both New Age and Catholic practices are adaptations of ancient Babylonian paganism, and now New Agers and Catholics alike are seeing the same deceptive signs and wonders in their respective spheres.

The prominent New Age organization Share International lists many instances of miraculous signs and wonders in Catholicism, the New Age movement, and even Islam and Hinduism:

We are witnessing a huge increase in the number of miraculous appearances. People worldwide describe seeing the Madonna or Jesus, while many others report meeting ‘angels’. Hundreds see Maitreya in dreams, visions, or in person...religious statues and icons weeping tears, real blood and even pearls; the extraordinary Hindu ‘milk-drinking’ statues in 1995; appearances or sightings of the Madonna; holy messages in fruit and vegetables...ⁱⁱⁱ

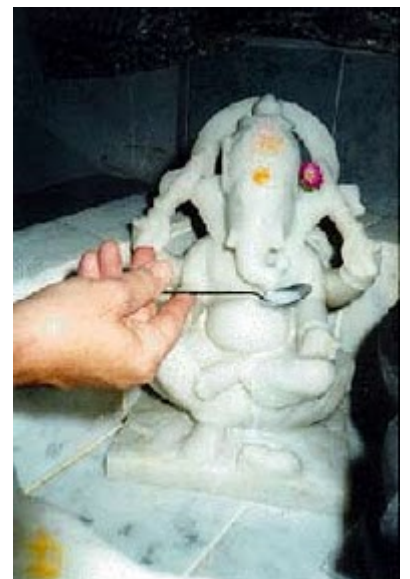
A Holland news service says this about miracles taking place in Teheran, Iran:

“It is reported in various parts of the city that an image of Jesus has been seen on fences or in windows. People have gathered to witness it for themselves.” So writes the Iranian newspaper Akhbar in its 25 December 1995 edition. Reuters news agency quotes newspaper reports of the face of Jesus appearing on the wall of a flat in the Iranian capital of Teheran. The report also mentions the spontaneous healing of a paralysed girl from a Christian family. Rumours spread like wildfire within the city and hundreds of Iranian Christians and Muslims alike flocked to the apartment building. An elderly woman in a black chador claimed it had happened before and that a Muslim man suffering from cancer had been healed on that occasion.^{iv}

New Age teacher Benjamin Creme says that the signs occurring in every religion are proof that the New Age Christ—the Maitreya—is coming:

These events are occurring on a world-wide scale, and are part of the signs which people expect and look for in connection with the reappearance of the Christ today...

They are signs that we have come to the end of one era and the beginning of a new one, and that the Christ has returned to the world to inaugurate this new cycle...



I was contacted by one of the disciples of the Christ in January 1959, and soon afterwards was given, by Maitreya Himself, the task of preparing the way for Him. I have been doing this for nearly 20 years now. My role is to create a climate of hope and expectancy for the return of the Christ, so that He can enter our lives without infringing our free will.^v

Here are other examples of signs and wonders happening around the world:

- Healing water in Nordenau, Germany
- Crosses of light appearing
- Circles of light appearing
- Milk drinking icons
- Crystal tears
- Native American White Buffalo
- Don Bosco
- Signs of his presence
- Apparitions at Medjugorje

Can the signs in New Age circles regarding the Maitreya and signs in Catholic circles regarding Mary be one and the same? The similarities in these supposed miracles seem to indicate that they came from the same source. But as we will read in our next article, these signs rarely align with the character of the true God and therefore could not have come from Him.

Stigmata

What are Stigmata?

Stigmata are wounds on the body that correspond with the suffering Jesus experienced during the crucifixion. Common stigmata include forehead wounds seemingly caused by a crown of thorns, marks on the hands and feet where Jesus would have been pierced by nails, and even marks across the arms and back similar to those Jesus bore from being flogged.



Most stigmata occurs in Roman Catholic circles. Stigmatists believe that by bearing stigmata, they are suffering with Mary, honoring Christ, and helping to pay the penalty for others' wrongdoing. They believe that God Himself is inflicting these wounds supernaturally.

However, stigmata go against the very nature of God. The atonement—Christ death and resurrection to pay our penalty—is worthless if humans are required to suffer Christ's wounds all over again. Scripture tells us that Christ died once, for all.

Some instances, such as St. Francis' hand and foot wounds, can be explained as the result of other normal medical issues. However, some stigmata cannot easily be explained away by science. They are deceptive wounds, inflicted by Satan.

Marie Rose Ferron

Marie Rose Ferron (1902-1936) was a Roman Catholic born in Quebec. For most of her short adult life, which was spent in Rhode Island, Ferron experienced terrible stigmata.

Bloody wounds appeared on her hands, feet, forehead, and arms, and Ferron would often pass out from the intensity of the pain. But according to one biography, she was happy to suffer, believing that she was suffering in order to take the punishment for other people's sin:

She found even love for the passion He was completing in her reduced body. As the story of pain unfolded with the months and the years, the realization that she was a victim grew more vivid.



She knew that she was being tortured in the place of others and she accepted her vocation of bearing in her own body the physical pain spared them. In that, too, she resembled her Master, whose love prompted Him to bear mankind's punishment in its stead.^{vi}

Marie Rose Ferron died at 33 years of age, still covered in painful stigmata.^{vii} If Jesus died once, for all our sins, is it necessary for anyone else to suffer the pain of the crucifixion? No. It is Satan—not God—inflicting suffering upon the stigmatists.

Pointless Pain

Many others have experienced similar symptoms to Marie Ferron. A young Syrian girl named Myrna Nazzour suffered intense and excruciating bleeding from her hands, feet, and head.

Irishwoman Christine Gallagher experiences the same suffering. Other modern stigmatists include Therese Neumann of Germany (1898-1962), Padre Pio of Italy (1887-1968), Catalina Rivas of Bolivia, and Julia Kim of Korea.

Stigmata is a declaration that the sacrifice of Christ is incomplete. Satan would love to have us believe that Christ is not powerful enough to provide salvation, and that

we need to earn it ourselves. But it is simply not Biblical that anyone should suffer any longer in order to pay for the sins of the world.

The unfortunate truth is that these poor people are suffering for nothing. Their pain does not please God and is not atoning for any wrong done.

i. . R. Vincent, *Please Come Back to me and my Son* (Ireland's Eye Publications, 1992): 7.

ii. Father Gobbi's interior locutions: Message 25.

iii. "Signs and Miracles," Share International, share-international.org.

iv. NRC Handelsblad (Holland: 1995).

v. Monte Leach, "Do you believe in miracles?" Interview with Benjamin Creme, *Share International* (July/August 1993).

vi. "Mystics of the Church: Marie Rose Ferron American Mystic-Visionary-Stigmatic," *Mystics of the Church* online.

vii. Jeanne S. Bonin, *A Stigmatist: Marie-Rose Ferron* (Médiaspaul, 1988): 95, 248.