

To discredit the countless miracles that had been given in confirmation of the Catholic faith, the original Protestant Reformers utterly rejected the idea that miracles had continued beyond the apostolic age.

However, when the Pentecostal movement began in Protestantism in 1900, with its emphasis on miraculous healing and other charisms, the Pentecostals had to find ways to try to explain why such miracles had “vanished” for so long. The answer is that they never did, as the following quotes of the early Church Fathers show. Miracles have always been found in the Catholic Church, and the idea that they stopped with the death of the last apostle would have been foreign to the early Church Fathers.

Historian Ramsay MacMullen points out that contemporary miracles played a central role in Christian apologetics in the early centuries: “When careful assessment is made of passages in the ancient written evidence that clearly indicate [a] motive . . . leading a person to conversion, they show (so far as I can discover): first, the operation of a desire for blessings . . . second, and much more attested, a fear of physical pain . . . third, and most frequent, credence in miracles” (*Christianizing the Roman Empire*, 108).

“Christian writers themselves . . . portray the learned and sophisticated as having been won over by sheer force of logic, and the unlearned, by a sort of stupefaction or terror before the greatness of God’s power” (*ibid.*, 109).

THE MARTYRDOM OF POLYCARP

“When he [Polycarp] had . . . finished his prayer, those who were appointed for the purpose kindled the fire [to burn him to death]. And as the flame blazed forth in great fury, we to whom it was given to witness it beheld a great miracle and have been preserved that we might report to others what then took place. For the fire, shaping itself into the form of an arch, like the sail of a ship when filled with the wind, encompassed as by a circle the body of the martyr. And he appeared within, not like flesh which

is burnt, but as bread that is baked, or as gold and silver glowing in a furnace. Moreover, we perceived such a sweet odor, as if frankincense or some such precious spices had been smoking there. At length, when those wicked men perceived that his body could not be consumed by the fire, they commanded an executioner to go near and pierce him through with a dagger. And on his doing this, there came forth a dove and a great quantity of blood, so that the fire was extinguished, and all the people wondered that there should be such a difference between the unbelievers and the elect” (*Martyrdom of Polycarp* 15–16 [A.D. 155]).

IRENÆUS

“[Heretics are] so far . . . from being able to raise the dead, as the Lord raised them and the apostles did by means of prayer, and as has been frequently done in the [Catholic] brotherhood on account of some necessity. The entire church in that particular locality entreating with much fasting and prayer, the spirit of the dead man has returned, and he has been bestowed in answer to the prayers of the saints” (*Against Heresies* 2:31:2–4 [A.D. 189]).

TERTULLIAN

“[When a scorpion stings someone’s heel] we have faith for a defense, if we are not smitten with distrust itself also, in immediately making the sign [of the cross] and adjuring and besmearing the heel with the beast. Finally, we often aid in this way even the heathen, seeing we have been endowed by God with that power which the apostle [Paul] first used when he despised the viper’s bite [Acts 28:3-5]” (*Antidote Against the Scorpion* 1 [A.D. 211]).

EUSEBIUS OF CAESAREA

“The citizens of that parish [in Alexandria] mention many other miracles of Narcissus . . . among which they relate the following wonder as performed by him. . . . [T]he oil once failed while the deacons

were watching through the night at the great Paschal Vigil. Thereupon, the whole multitude being dismayed, Narcissus directed those who attended to the lights to draw water and bring it to him. This being immediately done he prayed over the water and with firm faith in the Lord commanded them to pour it into the lamps. And when they had done so, contrary to all expectation, by a wonderful and divine power the nature of the water was changed into that of oil. A small portion of it has been preserved even to our day by many of the brethren there as a memento of the wonder” (*Church History* 6:9:1–3 [A.D. 312]).

ATHANASIUS

“So take these as an example, beloved Dracontius, and do not say, or believe those who say, that the bishop’s office is an occasion to sin. . . . For we know both bishops who fast and monks who eat. We know bishops who drink no wine as well as monks who do. We know bishops who work miracles as well as monks who do not” (*Letters* 49:9 [A.D. 354]).

AMBROSE OF MILAN

“As I do not wish anything which takes place here in your absence to escape the knowledge of your holiness [my sister], you must know that we have found some bodies of holy martyrs. . . . We found two men of marvelous stature, such as those of ancient days. All the bones were perfect. . . . Briefly we arranged the whole in order, and as evening was now coming on, transferred them to the basilica of Fausta, where watch was kept during the night and some received the laying on of hands. On the following morning we translated the relics to the basilica called Ambrosian. During the translation a blind man was healed. . . . [Arians] deny that the blind man received sight, but he denies not that he is healed. He says: ‘I, who could not see, now see,’ and proves it by the fact. . . . He declares that when he touched the hem of the robe of the martyrs, wherewith the sacred relics were covered, his sight was restored” (*Letters* 22:1–2, 17 [A.D. 388]).

BASIL THE GREAT

“But where shall I rank the great Gregory [the Wonderworker] and the words uttered by him? Shall we not place among the apostles and prophets a man who walked by the same Spirit as they? . . . For by the fellow-working of the Spirit, the power which he had over demons was tremendous and so gifted was he with the grace of the word . . . that, though only seventeen Christians were handed over to him, he brought the whole people alike in town and country through knowledge to God. He too by Christ’s mighty name commanded even rivers to change their course and caused a lake . . . to dry up. Moreover his predictions of things to come were such as in no way to fall short of the great prophets” (*The Holy Spirit* 74 [A.D. 375]).

JEROME

“[A woman with three sick children came to Hilarion and] on reaching the saint she said: ‘I pray you by Jesus our most merciful God . . . to restore to me my three sons, so that the name of our Lord and Savior may be glorified in the city of the Gentiles. Then shall his servants enter Gaza and the idol Marnas shall fall to the ground.’ At first he refused and said that he never left his cell . . . [but] the woman did not leave him till he promised he would enter Gaza after sunset. On coming thither he made the sign of the cross over the bed and fevered limbs of each [child] and called upon the name of Jesus. Marvelous efficacy of the name! . . . In that very hour they took food, recognized the mourning mother, and with thanks to God warmly kissed the saint’s hands” (*Life of St. Hilarion* 14 [A.D. 390]).

JOHN CHRYSOSTOM

“[I]n our generation, in the case of him who surpassed all in ungodliness, I mean [the Emperor] Julian, many strange things happened. Thus, when the Jews were attempting to raise up again the temple at Jerusalem, fire burst out from the foundations and

utterly hindered them all; and when both his treasurer and his uncle and namesake made the sacred vessels the subject of their open insolence, one was eaten with worms and gave up the ghost, the other burst apart in the middle. Moreover, the fountains failing when sacrifices were made there and the entrance of famine into the cities together with the emperor himself was a very great sign. For it is usual with God to do such things when evils are multiplied" (*Homilies on Matthew* 4:2 [A.D. 391]).

AUGUSTINE

"In the same city of Carthage lived Innocentia, a very devout woman of the highest rank in the state. She had cancer in one of her breasts, a disease which, as physicians say, is incurable. . . . This lady we speak of had been advised by a skillful physician, who was intimate with her family, and she betook herself to God alone in prayer. On the approach of Easter, she was instructed in a dream to wait for the first woman that came out of the baptistery after being baptized and to have her make the sign of Christ upon the sore. She did so, and was immediately cured" (*The City of God* 22:8 [A.D. 419]).

"For even now miracles are wrought in the name of Christ, whether by his sacraments or by the prayers or relics of his saints. . . . But who but a very small number are aware of the cure which was wrought upon Innocentius . . . a cure wrought at Carthage, in my presence, and under my own eyes? . . . For he and all his household were devotedly pious. He was being treated by medical men for fistulae, of which he had a large number. . . . He had already undergone an operation but clearly needed another. . . . [H]e cast himself down . . . and began to pray; but in what a manner, with what earnestness and emotion, with what a flood of tears, with what groans and sobs, that shook his whole body and almost prevented him speaking. . . . [And when the] surgeons arrived, all that the circumstances required was ready; the frightful instruments were produced; all look on in wonder and suspense. . . . [But the sur-

geon] finds a perfectly firm scar! No words of mine can describe the joy, and praise, and thanksgiving to the merciful and almighty God, which was poured from the lips of all with tears of gladness. Let the scene [of rejoicing] be imagined rather than described!" (ibid.).

"A gouty doctor of the same city, when he had given his name for baptism and had been forbidden the day before his baptism from being baptized that year by black woolly-haired boys who appeared to him in his dreams (and whom he understood to be devils), and when . . . he refused to obey them but overcame them and would not defer being washed in the laver of regeneration, was relieved in the very act of baptism, not only of the extraordinary pain he was tortured with, but also of the disease itself" (ibid.).

"What am I to do? I am so pressed by the promise of finishing this work that I cannot record all the miracles I know, and doubtless several of our adherents, when they read what I have narrated, will regret that I have omitted many which they, as well as I, certainly know. Even now I beg these persons to excuse me and to consider how long it would take me to relate all those miracles, which the necessity of finishing the work I have undertaken forces me to omit. . . . Even now, therefore, many miracles are wrought, the same God who wrought those we read of [in the Bible is] still performing them, by whom he will and as he will" (ibid.).

POPE GREGORY I

"I determined, through the aid of your prayers for me, to send . . . a monk of my monastery for the purpose of preaching [to the heathen in Anglia]. And he, having with my leave been made bishop by the bishops of Germany, proceeded with their aid also to the end of the world to the aforesaid nation, and already letters have reached us telling us of his safety and his work, to the effect that he and those that have been sent with him are resplendent with such great miracles in the said nation that they seem to

imitate the powers of the apostles in the signs they display. Moreover, at the solemnity of the Lord's nativity [Christmas] which occurred in this first indication, more than ten thousand Angli are reported to have been baptized by the same, our brother and fellow bishop" (*Letters* 30 [A.D. 597]).

"I have given some instructions to Boniface, the guardian who is the bearer of these presents, for him to communicate to your holiness in private. Moreover, I have sent you keys of the blessed apostle Peter, who loves you, which are wont to shine forth with many miracles when placed on the bodies of sick persons" (ibid., 26).

CATHOLIC ANSWERS
2020 Gillespie Way, El Cajon, CA 92020
Toll free order line: (888) 291-8000
Web: www.catholic.com

Faith & Science

THE FATHERS KNOW BEST

DO MIRACLES STILL OCCUR?

