

The Supernatural Birth and Works of Christ

T. Austin-Sparks:

The Bible is a record of the long history of the conflict between the natural and the supernatural. That will sound strange to many ears because the element of conflict is so often ruled out by the explanation or excuse: 'Well, it is only natural.' 'It is just human nature.' 'You cannot go against nature.' Such arguments may be right if we accept that 'nature' or the natural is as it should be. So much depends upon such an acceptance of, and concurrence with, what we term 'natural'. For one thing, it is the question of what God calls natural or what man so defines it. But the fact is that what man calls natural, God calls unnatural; and what God calls natural, man calls supernatural. The Bible has an immense amount to say against what man calls natural, both as to its nature and its abilities. Further, the Bible is constituted on the principle that God is always trying to lift man from his natural life and place him on a supernatural level. From a certain time-point the Bible shows that a 'Fall' from one level to another resulted in everything becoming unnatural from God's stand point. Recovery from that 'Fall' has necessitated the intervention of the supernatural in every respect.

This contrast and conflict is summed up in one basic and comprehensive statement by the Apostle Paul: "Now the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: ...they are foolishness unto him; ...he cannot know them" (1 Corinthians 2:14).

In the immediate context of that statement the Apostle relates it to wisdom, the supreme wisdom of this world: to power, the supreme strength of this world: to knowledge; all the accumulated knowledge of this world's princes: and he shows to what extremes of folly and evil the outworkings of all this can go. It even resulted in their "crucifying the Lord of glory".

What a history of conflict relates to this supreme issue, the natural and the supernatural! If the conflict raged mainly in the realms of the Judaizers on the one hand and the philosophers on the other hand in New Testament times, in more recent times its battleground has been - and is - the theologians and the doctrinaires. The concentrated effort of so-called 'Scholarship' has been to eliminate the supernatural from every part of "the Faith once for all delivered to the saints". From the Virgin Birth of Christ, through His miracles, His cosmic supernatural death, to His bodily resurrection. This has been followed up into the nature of the Christian life, its inception in new birth; its sustenance from Heaven, and its consummation in the 'body of glory'.

The place of the supernatural has been taken by the psychological, the ethical, the humanistic, the philosophical, etc. Indeed, many have gone as far as to say that a supernatural Saviour is unnecessary; man is his own saviour, and his destiny is in his own hands. So the battle proceeds. God takes a long time, but although

"The mills of God grind slowly,
Yet they grind exceeding small:
Though with patience He stands waiting,
With exactness grinds He all."

The wisdom and the power of the natural man is being extended to the ultimate limit, but it is surely only fools who do not see that the world of the natural man is getting more and more hopelessly beyond his wisdom and his power, and it is getting very near to the point where it will destroy him with a terrible destruction. Only a supernatural intervention will save this creation at last. God's full and perfect knowledge has acted on this truth of the supernatural in every aspect of salvation, redemption and glory. The intervention of God in this world has always been supernatural because the natural is fully known by Him to be incompetent.

The Birth of the Redeemer - Supernatural

Hence the Saviour had to be a supernatural Saviour in every respect. His birth had to be supernatural! The whole controversy over the Virgin Birth of the Saviour has a far greater and deeper significance than a fragment of a creed or a physiological phenomenon. It is fundamentally related to the entire method of redemption. It cuts in two and sets in altogether different realms the humanity which is of man and that which is of God. "That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit" (John 3:6). Jesus Christ, by His very birth, introduces a new and different 'species', or order of humanity in the essential basic nature. God is involved in that humanity in a way in which it is not true of "the natural man" as we know him. He is a miracle at His very inception, the supernatural alone accounts for Him. Remove that and you only have a "Jesus of History", a man - if better - yet only like all other men in essential being.

The Works of the Redeemer - Supernatural

What was true of the birth of Christ was true of His works. We are not concerned with an argument that Jesus performed miracles, but our concern is to show that the miracles had a meaning which was more than themselves. There have been, and still are, works which in a sense are miraculous, but quite out of relation to Christ. He Himself said that there would be some who would say: "Lord... in Thy name we have done many mighty works, but (said He) I will say unto them... I never knew you." The phrase "mighty works" is thus used of Jesus, and of some who had no real relationship to Him. We must therefore conclude that there is something more in the miracles of Jesus than themselves. From a consideration of the Scriptures relating to this matter there seem to be three aspects of the miracles which lead us to the Divine supernaturalism. One relates to His person; who He was. The next to the immediate intention of His works. The third, their abiding significance for all time.

Both the Apostles John and Paul strongly and categorically affirmed that Jesus Christ was a party to, instrument, and object of the creation of the world. Their words are:

"The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by him; and without him was not anything made that hath been made" (John 1:2,3).

"In him were all things created... all things have been created through him, and unto him" (Colossians 1:16).

One of the favourite designations of God by the Old Testament Psalmists was "The creator of the heavens and the earth". "The sea and all that therein is."

The miracles of Christ touched the creation at every point: sea, elements, earth, bread, wine, the human body, etc. In this way He was demonstrating that He was the creator, so that, in this respect, His miracles revealed who He was as the creator and Lord of creation.

The immediate intention of His works was to show that God had visited the world to manifest His rights, authority, grace and glory in it. The repudiation of Him and His works involved no less a responsibility and consequence than the casting of God out of His world.

The most substantial and unanswerable argument for the supernatural in His works is in the third aspect, the abiding significance. It is John who takes the matter beyond "powers" and "wonders" to his unique definition - "Signs". The miracles were signs, that is, they signified more than the temporal acts. If lame men were miraculously made to walk, if deaf, dumb, blind, leprous people were miraculously given faculties and wholeness organically and constitutionally; and if helpless and hopeless victims of evil powers were set completely free, all this was intended to show what centuries of history in every part of the world have proved, and are still proving, that in and by Jesus Christ a supernatural salvation has been brought to man spiritually, morally, mentally and often physically.