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Wattala Claim

I have no desire to run down any religion and I am sans any religion. On the other hand, I am impelled to examine claims that are tantamount to a war on science-claims that can only serve to deceive a gullible public. The latest sensational story is a tale about an alleged miracle at St Anne's Church in Wattala, Sri Lanka- a dominantly Catholic suburb.

The claim is made by the Parish priest himself-Rev'd Father Sanjeev Mendis- listening to the story told by a young woman who reportedly said that she saw drops of sweat pouring down the visage of

not by divine intervention, however, but by effective deep meditation.

Violate Natural Laws

These tales do one thing: they claim certain happenings that violate natural laws, which form the very heart of scientific and technological investigation. The God-believers' stories are that it is divine or supernatural intervention. The 'supernatural influence,' contradicts natural laws and naturalistic explanation for phenomena. The simple reason is that we never experience such interruptions in natural laws in any general sense save for a few and far-between isolated personal stories or anecdotes.

David Hume on Miracles

David Hume, the 18th century Scottish philosopher and an intellectual giant in the history of the philosophical enterprise, gave the best logical repudiation of miracle tales to date. Hume wrote his account in his, "An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding." Even Professor Richard Dawkins does

firm in every pragmatic sense. Since they work, we accept them. Admittedly, it isn't logical to believe that just because a serial of events and consequences occurred in the past they would occur in the future, too. Hume admitted this illogicality but accepted the scientific truth on a pragmatic basis.

Taking off from the "fact" of these laws and the invariability of their occurrence, Hume proposed that a claim of a miracle has one sure test of veracity: the possibility of the miracle not happening should be even more crazy than the possibility that it did. In this way, one needs really substantially big evidence on behalf of the proposition that the



lems. Her troubles would have heightened her mental vulnerability to suggestion and illusion. In general, illusions can occur to anyone bathed in extreme faith or even in someone who has mental health issues. In the Wattala case, the appearance of tears in the picture of Jesus were not seen by any multitude of witnesses. Even in the instance of a "multitude" witnessing, there is something called collective illusion. It is also possible that a chemical reaction had occurred over something accidentally fallen on the picture. Thus, there is more probability in favour of the miracle not having happened. Applying Hume's criteria, the claim fails. I remember, years ago in Polonnaruwa, there was a story about Buddha's halo (Budu Res) displayed on the sun at the premises of the Somavati Chaityaya. It was, later, found that that was due to a car mirror causing a reflection. Until then, hundreds of unsuspecting villagers rushed to the scene and pilgrims arrived in busloads to worship.

TAKING A LOOK AT THE 'MIRACLE' AT WATTALA

a picture of Jesus given to her by some priests who brought the picture from Chakkuddi in India. "We had family problems for some time and these subsided since the miracle began," said this woman. "I have experienced some strange feelings which are hard to explain ever since this miracle began."

little more than develop on what Hume did say. David Hume first posits through the evidence of our experience that there is a defining regularity in the universe that is reflected in what are deemed laws of nature. The sun rises every morning. A ball thrown up, falls to the ground by the operation of the natural law of gravity; tides come in and out in regularity due to the gravity of the moon; liquids behave the same way, day in and day out. The illustrations of regular happenings of natural events are endless and the evidence for such regularity is vast. This observed regularity creates a kind of habit in our minds to predict that they would occur again and again in the future. Science and technology has advanced so much today on the central assumption of such predictability. Therefore, the "laws," are factual or are

miracle did happen. The balance in evidence should, in other words, heavily be on the side of the possibility of the miracle having actually occurred.

Application of Hume Criteria

We will leave the Biblical claims aside as we are a far away from history. Just take the Wattala case: The young woman's experience could possibly have been an illusion driven by suggestion. The report states that the woman had experienced family prob-

Lourdes, Fatima, and the Australian Case

The case of the cancer cure by the Australian saint, has been explained by scientists that remissions do naturally occur

Religion Depends on Miracles

Religious institutions world over and through the ages have depended on miracle stories to boost their faithful numbers. I say this is yet another one like the old ones. Persons in authority like the priest in this case should be doubly careful before they spread a narrative of this sort; they have a responsibility to tell the truth. The Bible relates many such miracles dur-

The case of the cancer cure by the Australian saint, has been explained by scientists that remissions do naturally occur at a percentage rate among cancer patients.

ing the time of Christ. The very resurrection from a state of death of Jesus Christ has been the centrepiece. Turning water into wine and feeding thousands of people with just one loaf of bread are just a few of the biblical stories.

Among the modern ones include the miracle at Lourdes and the miracle at Fatima, Portugal. Australian national pride was heightened when the Pope recently canonised one of her citizens, Mary McKillop, as "saint" for having "successfully interceded to cure a cancer patient." The Buddhists-although adherents of an atheist religion- have their own stories about "Iddi balaya," which is a kind of ability to levitate and fly through air without any mechanical device like an aeroplane. The latter power is alleged to have happened



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