

REVIEWS

MODERN MIRACULOUS CURES. By Dr François Leuret and Dr Henri Bon. Translated by John C. Barry, D.C.L., and A. T. Macqueen, M.B. (Peter Davis; 16s.)

'It is a far better thing to convert a sinner than to restore a dead man to life', said St Augustine, and it is important to recognize the *relative* importance of miracles in the life of the Church. That they are possible is an article of belief; they were promised by our Lord—indeed, that even greater things than he did would be done by those who believed in him. Yet no individual miracle, other than those mentioned in the Sacred Scriptures, is of faith. And it is not without interest that many of the greatest saints seem to have worked few, if any, miracles.

The possibility of working miracles is a necessary mark of the Church's function as the Body of Christ, and throughout the centuries the miraculous confirmation of Christ's promises has been constant. But the attestation of a miracle is a matter of evidence, namely that the cure (in cases of bodily healing) cannot be explained by the normal processes known to science. And with the spectacular development in recent times of methods of clinical examination as well as of an ever increasing knowledge of psycho-somatic features in illness, alleged miracles can now be submitted to the most exact scrutiny so as to eliminate any features that may have a natural or at least a doubtfully supernatural explanation. Whatever, then, may be said of miracles in the past, it is now possible to examine the alleged miracles of our own time with a care and accuracy that should satisfy even the most sceptical of critics.

Modern Miraculous Cures is a documented account of miracles that have occurred in the present century. Written by two French doctors, one of whom (Dr Leuret) was for many years President of the Medical Bureau and the Bureau of Scientific Studies at Lourdes, it has the advantage of being translated into English by a priest who is a Doctor of Canon Law (and so is familiar with the exacting requirements of the Congregation of Rites and of diocesan Commissions in the recognition of miracles) and by a distinguished Scottish physiologist. It is a serious and objective study, which should prove once and for all that the Church's recognition of miracles is subject to the most rigorous scientific examination.

The miracles described have occurred at a number of sanctuaries (Fatima, Knock, Pompeii, Beauraing) or are attributed to a saint or as yet uncanonized holy person. But the principal interest of the book lies in its description of the Lourdes Medical Bureau and of some of

the recent cures now officially recognized as miraculous. Medical interest in Lourdes began even at the time of the apparitions, and the cure of Pierre Bouriette of traumatic blindness was attested by Dr Dozous, whose attitude had been one of complete scepticism. In the same year a child of eighteen months was cured of a wasting disease of the bones by being plunged into the pool that had already been made to receive the waters of the miraculous spring. His cure convinced Dr Dozous, who may be said to have initiated the medical supervision of the cures that have, during the century that has passed, been the most publicized—though not necessarily the most important—features of Lourdes.

Today, as is well known, the Medical Bureau provides ample facilities for the examination of any alleged cure, and doctors of any religion or none are free to take part in its activities. But, contrary to popular belief, a judgment on whether the cure is miraculous is a matter for ecclesiastical authority, though the medical evidence is the principal factor in arriving at a decision. The care with which cases are considered may be gathered from the fact that in a typical year, 1948, eighty-three cases were accepted at the first enquiry by the Bureau at Lourdes, and of these fifteen survived further enquiry and only nine were submitted to the National Medical Council, which is a commission of distinguished consultants set up by the Bishop of Tarbes and Lourdes to examine the details supplied to it by the Lourdes Bureau. An even smaller number will ultimately survive the rigorous examination of the canonical commission set up by the Bishop of the patient's diocese to declare whether the cure is miraculous. There are many more cases of great medical interest, in which the explanation of cure may be beyond any existing clinical criteria, but they cannot satisfy the conditions of a true miracle. The authors quote the surprise of a doctor, of no great enthusiasm as a believer, who found that a case which he thought miraculous was rejected. 'How is it', he asked 'that you Church judges are harder to convince than I?'

This book, excellently documented and modestly presented, should do much to convince those who think that the Church is irresponsible or credulous in its judgment on the miraculous. The exact contrary is the case, and in this sphere, as in so many others, the Church has nothing to fear from scientific truth. But, in the case of Lourdes, it needs to be said that too great a concentration on the miraculous can obscure the essential meaning of the apparitions and of the spiritual realities that have made Lourdes unique in the Christian world as a place of prayer and penance. Of the thousands of sick pilgrims who come each year to Lourdes, only a tiny fraction can hope for cure. (And the authors give some vivid accounts of fraudulent cures, for, as

they remark, the forces of evil are by no means idle at Lourdes.) Are then the multitudes who return home without being cured deceived? No one who has visited one of the hospitals at Lourdes can believe that this is so. The accepted sufferings of the sick are the guarantee, above all else, of the essential meaning of our Lady's apparitions at Lourdes. The promise of happiness but only hereafter, the call for penance and prayer for sinners; these realities, so exactly achieved in the life of Bernadette herself (she is a saint not because she witnessed the apparitions but because she lived out their message), are the secret of the sanctity of Lourdes, and so of the innumerable graces that so many pilgrims receive. The miracles that have occurred at Lourdes are indeed a profound vindication of the truth of all that happened there. But they are of their nature exceptional, extraordinary, or they would not be miracles at all. All this is admirably conveyed by the authors of this book. But they cannot speak of the greatest miracle of all, the conversion of sinners, and that at Lourdes is beyond all reckoning.

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THE BACKGROUND OF THE NEW TESTAMENT AND ITS ESCHATOLOGY.

Studies in Honour of C. H. Dodd. (Cambridge University Press; 70s.)

Of recent years certain trends have developed in non-Catholic New Testament studies so hopeful in their emphasis and so fruitful in their results that no instructed Catholic can afford to ignore them. The present work is very much a case in point. It is a collection of twenty-six monographs by leading New Testament scholars from France, Germany, and England, and it affords a most valuable cross-section view of the direction in which New Testament studies are moving today.

The general impression is one of great hopefulness. In the field of textual criticism there is a feeling of discontent with our present editions both of the New Testament and of the Septuagint and a growing confidence that the fresh manuscript evidence which has been made available as well as the improved critical methods which have been gradually evolved will, within a measurable period, provide us with greatly improved critical editions.

Again the question of external influences on the content and expression of the New Testament is being more soberly and therefore more fruitfully explored. Exaggerations and hasty judgments are being quietly corrected. There is a greater disposition to recognize the uniqueness of the New Testament. Christianity is not derived from Gnosticism or the Mystery religions. It did not arise in response to