

# **Miracles and the Concept of Impossibility**

## The Resurrection, and the Shroud of Turin

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With a Foreword by

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**Series in Philosophy of Religion**



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# Foreword

When I first met Anthony (Tony), it was following a weekend gathering in which I had led worship. I can recall him approaching me as soon as we were done; I was instantly drawn in due to his slight grin and kind posture. Our conversation started with a question, “Are you familiar with the greatest hymn ever written?” This was a difficult question to respond to as the case could be made for so many hymns. However, he followed up with the answer as fast as the question was asked, “How Great Thou Art.” As we began to dialog on why this was the greatest hymn ever written, I have to admit that he was quickly winning me over with his perspective and explanation. After a great conversation, he left me with these words, “Sing it for me next weekend” with a look of jest and resolve. Tony disappeared into the crowd. I have to admit I did not sing the hymn the following weekend but I did add it to the list shortly after our conversation. The delight on his face following that gathering was amazing!

I share that story because what I have found through multiple conversations and reading Tony’s material, is that this is more than just a catchy tune to him that speaks of God and creation, it is the embodiment of his awe and wonder of a great God that is full of love and compassion towards people. The lyrics of this hymn are the expression that the God of all creation is also the God of the intimate. In scripture, we find Jesus making this powerful declaration over us, Jesus replied: ‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind’ (Matthew 22:37). I believe that the church does an excellent job of speaking to the heart and soul side of understanding. Tony, however, is doing a great work in giving us a wonderful understanding and wisdom into the depths of who God is and who we are in relation to that revelation through the mind. The way Tony sets out to show God’s existence not just through experience but also through science will be a gift to you on many levels.

One of the things that I have appreciated about this work is that while we hold some different theological positions, Tony’s approach is informative as well as open minded to conversations and disagreement. For instance, we differ in our position on universalism and physical hell. My belief is that God is love as shown through the depth of the atonement provided for us, *For God so loved the world (John 3:16)*. I also believe God is just and that it would be counter to His character to overlook the sins of man. I believe salvation is offered to all people but the way of salvation is through confession: “*Believe with your heart and confess with your mouth*” (Romans 10:9). I do agree that our leverage of hell and eternal damnation has gone outside the boundaries of its intent at times.

When we use hell to scare or manipulate towards salvation, we have lost our way. I also believe there is a Physical Hell; I believe those that do not turn to God will find themselves there. I don't believe this is out of an angry, abusive position from God. I truly believe that we will never fully know the heartache sin and eternal Damnation is to God until we see Him face to face. I understand the argument usage of verses stating "All Men" and the attachment to the universal argument, but I see them as opportunities for transformation more of an invitation than a declaration. It is the If/Then principle we find in scripture. "If my people, then I will". I do not see these verses as definitive proclamation cast over all people as a blanket statement of salvation. This is why I see the evangelistic call to the church as the highest importance. We must go and tell of the good news so that all may hear and know the goodness of God. It has been a joy to get to know Tony and his desire and passion for the Lord are both refreshing and encouraging in my own life.

Rick Flood  
Executive Pastor  
Compelled Church



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# Preface

This book takes a fresh look at the miracle of the Resurrection of Jesus Christ. A miracle is a claim that something occurred that is deemed inexplicable by the normal methods of science. This being the case, most scientists and laypersons are of the opinion that miracles are highly improbable or even impossible. Scottish Enlightenment philosopher David Hume's 1748 essay *Of Miracles* is usually taken as the definitive statement about the impossibility of miracles. Hume asserted that miracles are violations of the laws of nature and of our uniform experience of them, and must thus be ruled out absolutely. If miracles are defined as impossible, it behooves us to examine what the concept of *impossibility* actually means. I am not talking about the logically impossible, but the statistically impossible.

There is a boundary of probability beyond which the improbable becomes the impossible. This has been calculated by mathematician William Dembski, who puts it at  $10^{150}$ . This incredible figure completely exhausts all probability resources since it is the sum of all the atoms in the universe, all the seconds since the universe began, and the fastest possible time in which an event can occur (Planck time). Physicist Nima Arkani-Hamed once declared in a talk that the universe is inevitable and that it is also impossible. That sounds very much like a logical impossibility because something impossible cannot be inevitable. Yet here we are, so half of that statement is indisputably true. What about the impossible half, what could he have meant by that? He was referring to the mind-boggling improbability that a biocentric universe should exist at all. For instance, Nobel laureate physicist Sir Roger Penrose calculated the probability of the universe getting started compatible with the second law of thermodynamics (the lowest possible entropy or disorder) as  $10^{10}$  <sup>(123)</sup>. This is many orders of magnitude beyond the probability boundary and is thus "impossible." If a miracle is defined as an impossibility, then Arkani-Hamed is right—the universe is impossible. If the universe is impossible, is it a miracle, even though it comports with our uniform experience of it?

The origin of life on this once barren rock we call home appears just as miraculously impossible. How did dead organic molecules evolve into the organic molecules of life? The optimism following the famous 1953 Miller/Urey experiment has slowly dissolved into pessimism after millions of man-hours and dollars have been spent on researching the issue. Even Urey has admitted that the more scientists look into the origin of life, the more we feel that it is too complex to have evolved. However, he does believe as an article of *faith* that life evolved and developed the metabolic and reproductive capabilities necessary

to move from chemical to biological evolution. So, what is the best probability calculation for life to have come from dead matter by completely natural means? Astrophysicists Fred Hoyle and Chandra Wickramasinghe's probability calculations arrived at a statistical improbability far greater than even Penrose's for the origin of the universe. They arrived at the astounding value of one part in  $(10^{20})^{2000}$ , or  $10^{40,000}$ . To beat such an improbability is surely a miracle.

The remaining chapters examine the Resurrection event, beginning with what it means in terms of the atonement and the concept of universal salvation. After addressing those issues, I examine the historical evidence for the Resurrection and reasons why we can trust the New Testament. Historians judge the reliability of ancient documents by looking at the number of existing copies of the original text and at the time gap between the earliest existing manuscripts and the time when the original was written. A text is considered reliable to the extent that the number of existing manuscripts is large and the time gap between them and the event they portray is short. The New Testament is far closer to meeting those criteria than any other ancient document. What is more, archaeology is consistently unearthing artifacts confirming that people and places recorded in the Bible formerly considered fictitious did indeed exist.

The next two chapters address the Resurrection of Christ. First, I examine the historical evidence, that relies on the explanatory scope and power of a theory. I also address the trustworthiness of the New Testament in terms of these criteria and in terms of archaeological evidence. The second chapter considers secular explanations of the Resurrection: the wrong tomb, fraud, conspiracy, legend, "swoon," hallucination, vision, and conversion disorder hypotheses. These explanations are pitted against the Christian account in terms of their explanatory scope and power. Secular accounts purport to explain only one of the agreed-upon facts whereas the biblical explanation accounts for them all, and thus the Christian account has far greater explanatory scope and power.

The final two chapters look at the "silent witness" to the Resurrection; the Shroud of Turin. This cloth bears the image of a terribly tortured and crucified man. The first of these chapters examines the vague history of the cloth from the death of Christ to the present, and the second looks at the forensic evidence for its authenticity. For 125 years, scientists have been unable to discover how the image was imprinted on the cloth, thus I conclude that it is the "silent witness" to the Resurrection—the authentic burial cloth of Jesus Christ.

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