

# OF MIRACLES AND METAPHYSICS: A PENTECOSTAL-CHARISMATIC AND PROCESS-RELATIONAL DIALOGUE

*by Joshua D. Reichard*

*Abstract.* This article is comprised of a dialogue between Pentecostal-Charismatic and Process-Relational theologies on the perennial issue of miracles. The language of supernaturalism, widely employed by Pentecostal-Charismatic theologians, is contrasted with the metaphysical naturalism of Process-Relational theology; it is proposed that a philosophically and scientifically sensitive theology of miracles is possible through a synthesis of both traditions. Themes such as nonmaterialism over materialism, spiritual experience, and prayer for healing miracles are explored. A theology of miracles, mutually informed by both Pentecostal-Charismatic and Process-Relational theologies, may focus less on whether or not miracles are possible, but instead focus more on what kind of miracles human beings might value most. By mutually engaging a theology of nonsupernatural, metaphysically grounded miracles, Pentecostal-Charismatic and Process-Relational theologians may collaborate to establish the groundwork for creative scientific enterprises, especially in the non-Western world where Pentecostalism continues to experience its most rapid growth. Such perspectives may eventually lead to cutting-edge discoveries about the fundamental nature of, and God's interaction with, reality itself. Implications for future research are proposed.

*Keywords:* metaphysics; miracles; open theism; Pentecostalism; philosophical theology; process theology; relational theology; theology and science

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Contemporary science, as an enterprise of inquiry, may be enhanced by non-Western and postmodern theological perspectives and thereby opened to the exploration of expanded possibilities such as consciousness, mind, soul, healing, purpose, and meaning. By effectively expanding the limitations of Western scientific materialism, scientific endeavors spearheaded by innovators in the Pentecostal-Charismatic movements may come to new and exciting discoveries about the nature of reality, its relation to God, and the possibility of nonsupernatural miracles.

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As adherents of the fastest growing religious movement in the non-Western world, Pentecostals and Charismatics stand at the forefront of contemporary science-theology dialogue. For example, the work of James K. A. Smith, Amos Yong, and other Pentecostal theologians (e.g., Smith 2008; Smith and Yong 2010) illustrates a refreshing and innovative engagement with science. Further, Yong's (2007) comprehensive work on science and theology also represents the potential for Pentecostals and Charismatics to contribute to innovative and "imaginative" scientific insights. However, Pentecostal-Charismatic theologians largely lack a metaphysical framework to ground their experiences, claims, and theologies. Together, with the metaphysics of Process-Relational theology, advances in the scientific understanding of reality can be expanded to include the "miracles" that are passionately envisioned by Pentecostals and Charismatics.

Metaphysics (or "metatheoretical principles") ultimately shape or constrain what scientists deem as compatible with advancing scientific knowledge (Koperski 2011, 5). Metaphysical perspectives inform scientific methodology and influence the priorities of scientific enterprises. Process-Relational theology provides a robust metaphysical system by which dialogue with science can be intelligently advanced. However, with apparent premodern conceptions of reality, including a supernatural worldview and an emphasis on miraculous events, Pentecostal-Charismatic theology may seem the most unlikely of bedfellows for Process-Relational theology in a science-religion dialogue. However, because Pentecostal-Charismatic and Process-Relational theologians both affirm a nonmaterial reality, the future possibilities of scientific enterprise are perhaps the most exciting aspect of a synthesis between the two traditions. In this article, scholars and ideas from both traditions are brought into critical dialogue with one another to establish common ground for an affirmation of the possibility of non-supernatural miracles in the context of contemporary science.

Although both traditions have roots in the West, neither tradition can be identified as entirely Western. Process-Relational theology is arguably among the most un-Western of Western rational theologies and thus highly compatible with the less restrictive ideals of postmodern science; in fact, Process-Relational philosophy provides an ample set of "metaphysical commitments" to ground such new scientific advances (Koperski 2011, 49). Similarly, the Pentecostal-Charismatic moments have expanded their reach far into the developing world, where they continue to experience their most rapid growth. Together, these two theological perspectives, although apparently disparate, may provide fresh insights into the theological, rational, and scientific possibility of miracles and challenge assumptions about the fundamental nature of reality itself. Thus, as Thomas Jay Oord (2011) observes, Process-Relational dialog with Pentecostals and Charismatics has the "potential to turn the science-and-religion dialogue into a mutually transformative engagement."

The values of postmodernism can facilitate such a task of theological development insofar as they can help expand the limitations of scientific materialism, thereby recovering a holistic worldview that accounts for more than material reality alone (Oden 1992, 11). The Pentecostal-Charismatic movements have more intrinsically in common with postmodernism than with modernism (Lederle 1994, 26). Early in the contemporary Pentecostal-Charismatic movements, John Wimber (1985) accused the Western world of intense secularization and living as if “material cause and effect” sufficiently explains all of human experience (77–78). The Pentecostal-Charismatic movements have brought deep changes in attitudes regarding human perceptions of reality, challenging the “contemporary idolatries of rationalism, naturalism, and individualism” (Lederle 1994, 24). Process-Relational theology has largely endeavored to do the same.

While there are significant differences between the Pentecostal-Charismatic and Process-Relational conceptions of miracles, there are also profound similarities. Although Pentecostal-Charismatic theologians tend toward a more literal biblical interpretation of miracles, Process-Relational theologians share a common value of coming to know and understand the activity of God in the world. For both Pentecostal-Charismatic and Process-Relational theologians, there is a “mutual relationship” between God and the world (Kärkkäinen 2002, 127). Despite the fact that interpretations of the biblical accounts of miracles vary between Pentecostal-Charismatic and Process-Relational theologians, it would be one-dimensional to say that Pentecostal-Charismatic theologians are naive as to the veracity of the biblical accounts of miracles while Process-Relational theologians are more attuned to rational science. In reality, both traditions can mutually enrich one another: Pentecostals may come to appreciate the necessity and validity of rational scientific methodology and Process theists may come to embrace the exuberant and joyful expectation of God’s loving and “miraculous,” albeit nonsupernatural, activity in the world.

#### AN ANALYSIS OF DIFFERENCES: SUPERNATURALISM AND METAPHYSICAL NATURALISM

There are, however, fundamental differences between the language that Pentecostals and Charismatics use to describe their experiences and the language used by Process-Relational theologians. When describing miracles, Pentecostal-Charismatic theologians tend toward supernaturalistic language, while Process-Relational theologians tend toward metaphysical and naturalistic language. Without critically analyzing this profound difference, any discussion of compatibility between the two traditions on the possibility of miracles becomes obfuscated. The supernaturalism that Process-Relational theology rejects is not necessarily the same supernaturalism

that Pentecostals and Charismatics affirm; in like manner, the naturalism that Process-Relational theologians affirm is not the same naturalism that Pentecostals and Charismatics reject.

The supernatural emphases of the Pentecostal-Charismatic movements reinforce anti-intellectualism and an aversion to rational science. These emphases include: the idea of the Baptism of the Holy Spirit as a “cure all,” the expression of “verbal gifts” that bypass the intellect, the doctrine of the “rapture” as escapism, the doctrine of sanctification that encourages rebuke of the world as inherently evil, and “altar theology” that reinforces a notion of instantaneous blessing or power (Nañez 2005, 117–25). Craig Keener (2011), for example, reluctantly uses “supernatural” language to retell miraculous accounts, suggesting that the language-at-hand is the best available. However, such supernaturalism is viewed by the Western intellectual world as not only premodern, irrational, and simplistic, but entirely incompatible with a scientific worldview.

Pentecostals and Charismatics have long argued that the work of the church should be “accompanied by spiritual manifestations: miracles, signs, and wonders” (Williams 1992, 146), all of which speak of supernatural disruptions of the natural world. For Pentecostals and Charismatics, God acts in miraculous ways by supernaturally breaking through natural barriers and disrupting natural processes. As Candy Brown (2011) notes, Pentecostals and Charismatics assume the “existence of a dynamic interaction between the material and spiritual worlds” (50); however, the affirmation of such interaction often devolves into dualism. The idea of God either initiating the first cause or interacting with secondary causes in the world characterizes a notion of contradictory dualism between God and the world, thereby reinforcing the idea that if God acts, God must disrupt normal causal mechanisms.

However, in the scientific community dualistic language regarding natural and supernatural realities has been largely eclipsed by the prevailing worldview of scientific materialism. The once dominant dualism, reinforced by supernatural language, was eventually supplanted by scientific materialism:

The final step in the mechanistic revolution was to reduce two levels of explanation to one. Instead of a duality of matter and mind, there is only matter. This is the doctrine of materialism, which came to dominate scientific thinking in the second half of the nineteenth century. Nevertheless, despite their nominal materialism, most scientists remained dualists, and continued to use dualistic metaphors. (Sheldrake 2012, 34)

Thus, the supernaturalism that dominates the Pentecostal-Charismatic movements faces greater rejection from the scientific community because even dualistic language has been discarded by scientific materialists. Scientific materialism, the assumption that the material world is all there is to

reality, has come to dominate Western science, and as such stands in direct conflict with Pentecostal-Charismatic claims about supernatural miracles. The solution to this conflict is not to affirm supernatural dualism, but to embrace a deeper metaphysical naturalism.

Scientific methodology, in terms of methodological naturalism, does not necessitate materialism (Smith and Yong 2010, 36). Scientific methodology, as a means of measuring and describing the natural world remains one of the most appropriate intellectual tools human beings can use to observe reality. On the other hand, scientific materialism, which assumes that reality is only physical, material, and natural, can be characterized as much a matter of belief as the supernaturalism supported by Pentecostals and Charismatics (Sheldrake 2012, 6). Scientific materialism, as a worldview, severely limits the “explanatory resources of science” (Koperski 2011, 42). Thus, scientific materialism can only limit science, and if theology is to interact with science at all, forces it into a dualistic box: if God acts, God must act externally on an otherwise material world. However, Process-Relational theologians reject such dualism, which only precipitates and reinforces supernaturalism. For example, Philip Clayton (2008) argues that it is possible to speak of miracles without using the “vocabulary of separate and sometimes interacting substances” (136). A synthesis of Pentecostal-Charismatic and Process-Relational perspectives provides a viable alternative for applying scientific methodology to understanding reality beyond the limits of materialism.

In contrast with both supernatural dualism and scientific materialism, Process-Relational theology is characterized by metaphysical naturalism. Metaphysical naturalism rejects the possibility of any external intervention to disrupt natural causes. However, there is a clear distinction between naturalism according to a purely materialistic, deterministic, mechanistic, reductionist definition and the metaphysical definition that Process-Relational philosophers propose. Within the scope of Process-Relational theology, metaphysical naturalists recognize that while physical processes are the most apparent causes in the physical world, the metaphysical construction of reality provides the possibility of nonphysical reality having effects on physical reality. Thus, scientific methodology remains the most appropriate means of observing physical effects in the natural world. At the same time, the open-endedness of metaphysical naturalism allows sufficient room for the nonsupernatural activity of God (Drees 2010, 10).

Metaphysical naturalism, in terms of Process-Relational philosophy, is an ontological perspective in which all of reality can be explained in metaphysically grounded naturalistic terms. Moreover, metaphysical naturalism is monistic rather than dualistic, but the nature of reality is understood as nonsubstance based and nonmaterial. While “naturalism proper” typically represents a rejection of the possibility of the existence of mind or spirit independent of matter, metaphysical naturalism in the Process-Relational

tradition is an affirmation of the possibility of nonmaterial realities because it is not dualistic: there are no substances, only events. The material world does not represent the only natural reality; nature itself is fundamentally nonmaterial.

In fact, David Ray Griffin (2000) defends the possibility of parapsychological phenomena, but firmly clarifies that such phenomena are explainable in terms of extraordinary natural abilities, not supernatural divine intervention. Griffin proposed:

Parapsychology, besides showing that those types of events traditionally considered miracles are not different in kind of events reported in most religious traditions, also provides reason believe that they are explainable in terms of natural, albeit extraordinary, powers possessed by certain human beings, so that no supernatural act of God need be invoked. (11)

In this way, Griffin and other Process-Relational theologians maintain that these apparent conflicts between theology and science can be overcome, even when supposed miracles or other extraordinary phenomenon occur (Griffin 2000, 23). As such, Process-Relational theists affirm the possibility of a Christian faith that does not presuppose supernatural intervention or the disruption of nature by God. According to this view, God may act directly within the natural world in ways that are not outside the scope of scientific observation (Koperski 2011, 48). If this is the means by which God is said to work, then miracles need not be described in supernatural terms.

For Process-Relational theologians, the possibility of miracles is not a debate concerning natural or supernatural activity of God, because in panentheism, all things are in God and God is always at work in all things (Mesle 1993, 115). Although extraordinary natural occurrences or even parapsychological activity may be possible, the fact that supernatural intervention is not presupposed marks a significant difference with the Pentecostal-Charismatic movements. In so doing, Process-Relational theology may represent a bridge for Pentecostals and Charismatics between the necessity of scientific observation and an enthusiastic expectation of miracles in the natural world.

#### A SYNTHESIS OF SIMILARITIES: NONMATERIALISM, EXPERIENCE, AND HEALING

Eberhard Jüngel (1971) contended that Western civilization focuses too heavily on reality as it appears to be (*Wirklichkeit*) and not enough on what it can be (*Möglichkeit*). Jüngel challenged Western civilization to consider that “the possible” should gain priority over “the actual” (213–21). Both Pentecostal-Charismatic and Process-Relational theologians would agree that this has been an egregious oversight on the part of Western civilization and thus find a common affinity toward a new vision of theology

and science that embraces nonmaterialism, experience, and God's healing activity in the world. It may therefore be possible for a synthesis of both traditions that advances a scientific perspective on miracles beyond the "ethnocentrism" of the Western scientific materialist worldview (Keener 2011). Therefore, both traditions may affirm a deeper, scientifically sensitive naturalism, grounded in metaphysics.

In so doing, belief in God's loving activity in the natural world need not rest on the assumption of supernatural intervention (Mesle 1993, 137; Smith and Yong 2010). In fact, Walter Hollenweger (2002) argued that it has never been adequately established that the Bible separates reality into natural and supernatural realms; these categories, Hollenweger concluded, are largely due to Thomistic influences on Western theology (668), a point on which Process-Relational and Pentecostal-Charismatic theologians may come to agree. Both traditions share a common desire to move beyond the limits of materialism (Mesle 1993, 127); neither tradition affirms such a limited vision of the world. Thus, a desire for a nonmaterialistic worldview establishes the groundwork upon which both traditions can begin a dialogue concerning the possibility of miracles.

*Nonmaterialism over Materialism.* When the simple question is asked, "Can spirit influence matter?", both Pentecostal-Charismatic and Process-Relational theologians would resoundingly say "yes." While the metaphysical mechanics involved in the actualization of such a possibility may differ between the two traditions, there is commonality, at least on basic assumptions. Although neither the Pentecostal-Charismatic movements nor Process-Relational theology can be characterized entirely as "immaterialist" in the strict philosophical sense, they share a common rejection of dualistic or materialistic assumptions about mind, spirit, and matter; in spite of the fact that their terminology does not always neatly align (Smith and Yong 2010, 45).

The belief that matter exists entirely independent of the mind depends on the subject-object dichotomy of materialistic-dualism and Newtonian physics, with the belief that mind can influence matter, or contingent upon the concepts of indeterminacy from "the new physics" (De Arteaga 1992, 131–212). However, neither Pentecostal-Charismatic nor Process-Relational theologians would affirm such dualism on a metaphysical level. Practically speaking, Pentecostal-Charismatic and Process-Relational theologians would instead generally affirm a "nonmaterialist" perspective, even if their theological language remains highly suggestive of dualism. Reality is more than, if not altogether distinct from, the material world.

Although Pentecostal-Charismatic theologians identify their experiences in terms of supernatural intervention, they certainly do not affirm that the material world is entirely materialistic, mechanistic, or deterministic. Similarly, Process-Relational theologians affirm that mind and spirit

can influence matter, but reject the notion that such influence insists upon an interruption or subversion of natural laws. Thus, in general, both Process-Relational and Pentecostal-Charismatic theologians deny the dualistic assumption that causes and effects are strictly dichotomized into material and nonmaterial categories (Cobb 2003, 15; Smith and Yong 2010). Process-Relational theologians affirm that God and the human mind can both influence the material world, albeit such influence is not to be confused with coercion or intervention in any way; it is merely intrinsic to the naturalistic processes upon which all of reality is based. God is immanent within, and yet deeper than the limitations of, the material world. From the Pentecostal-Charismatic perspective, Smith (2008) quite succinctly calls this a “Pentecostal ontology.”

Minimally, both traditions can agree with Veli-Mati Kärkkäinen (2002) that an emphasis on the immanence of God confronts the “dualism of God and nature that has characterized the Western tradition” (159–60). The immanence of God, in the face of a world dominated by scientific materialism, establishes the possibility of miracles in the natural world. Perhaps then the deepest reality, and that which is really real, is that which is beyond direct observation and measurement alone.

*Experience and Novelty.* If reality is primarily nonmaterial and God is primarily immanent, then human beings must be able to directly experience God. Historically, Pentecostals and Charismatics grounded their movements in “pragmatism, experientialism, emotionalism, romanticism, individualism, and anti-intellectualism” (Nañez 2005, 97). Early Pentecostals grounded their faith in dynamic experiences, not in intellectual beliefs or constructs (Pinnock 2006, 166). While Pentecostals and Charismatics seek to understand miracles in purely biblical terms through a rediscovery of the New Testament experience, Process-Relational theologians seek a scientifically and philosophically viable explanation for miracles. Griffin (2000) noted of John B. Cobb, Jr. that he is more impressed by “experiential evidence than by formal argument,” meaning that as a theologian, he is more empiricist than rationalistic (16). Although a general affirmation of religious experience exists among Process-Relational theologians, they simultaneously seek to reconcile science and theology in ways that allow for dynamism, spontaneity, and freedom; values that they consider indispensable. Further, for Pentecostal-Charismatic theologians, religious experience is central to knowing and understanding God’s activity in the world (Chan 1998, 48). Spontaneous experiences, dynamic divine direction, and unanticipated divine manifestations characterize the expectations of Pentecostals and Charismatics as they experience the Holy Spirit (Smith 2008). Common among radically diverse cultures and nationalities, such experiential dynamism can be traced throughout the global Pentecostal-Charismatic movements. Process-Relational theologians, especially pastoral theologians



such as Bruce Epperly, strongly affirm religious experience. In emphatic terms, Process-Relational theologians believe that human beings “prehend” God in every moment through direct personal experience (Cobb 2003, 99). Like Pentecostals and Charismatics, Process-Relational theologians affirm the notion that a direct, immanent relationship with God is central to the possibility of miracles. Because both Pentecostal-Charismatic and Process-Relational theologians both value spiritual experience and embrace the nonmaterial possibility of spiritual influence on matter, dialogue as to how and if miracles occur is possible and promising.

*Prayer and Healing.* Further, because the Pentecostal-Charismatic and Process-Relational traditions both affirm a nonmaterial reality and immanent experiences of God, prayer for healing miracles also has potential compatibility. However, the Pentecostal-Charismatic perspective is based on the rationale that if God can supernaturally intervene to change circumstances in the world, then human beings must be able to solicit such action from God. While Process-Relational theologians affirm that human beings can cooperate with the divine will, they simultaneously deny that human beings can effectively beseech God to do something God would not otherwise already do. Therefore, prayer does not evoke God to act, but connects human beings with what God is already doing in the world (Mesle 1993, 112). Such *concursum*, the dynamic interaction between God and human beings, characterizes the ideals of Pentecostals and Charismatics as well.

Moreover, because the doctrine of divine healing is central to Pentecostal-Charismatic belief, prayers for miraculous divine healing are central as well. However, any notion of prayer that is based on the idea that “God can simply heal whenever God wishes” must also presuppose that in a given situation of need, “God has so far chosen not to do so” (Mesle 1993, 112). For Process-Relational theologians, God is not the “unilateral agent for healing” because God cannot simply disrupt the entire natural order to impose the arbitrary divine will as a reaction to human faith (Cobb 2003, 17). Process-Relational theologians understand prayer for healing as implicit, but not guaranteed, because although God is always at work luring the body to health, there are countless other factors in each occasion of the body’s experience that determine its physical state moment by moment. However, God’s activity is one factor, among many other factors, in the multifaceted chain of causal events that may or may not lead to an unexpected physical healing.

Nevertheless, prayer is “not magic or supernatural”; rather, for Process-Relational theologians, prayer is a meaningful effort to align and cooperate with God, “to do what God cannot do so that God can do God’s work more effectively” (Mesle 1993, 116). In other words, the practice of prayer for healing should align the human being with God’s best intentions, which in turn enables God to realize God’s purposes. Not because God

reacts positively to a human request, but because the human being reacts positively to the divine lure. God's interaction with human beings is implicit in every moment of experience so that prayer becomes cooperation with God to do that which God is already and always doing, calling all things, including the human body, to health and wholeness (Mesle 1993, 116). Thus, if God is already and always working toward healing, then aligning oneself to that healing through prayer can only positively contribute to the healing process (Cobb 2003, 104).

Further, prayer is not only personal, but also intercessory. A common practice in Pentecostal-Charismatic churches is intercessory prayer, praying for the healing of others who are afflicted. Process-Relational theologians do not entirely dismiss the practice of intercessory prayer. Praying for the healing of others is one way in which believers can align themselves to God's continual healing activity in the world (Cobb 2003, 104). The practice of intercession, when understood as "prehending other people all the time" can "certainly make a difference" in the physical healing of one another (Cobb 2003, 104). However, the Process-Relational understanding of how intercessory prayer works is thoroughly distinct from the Pentecostal-Charismatic understanding of such prayer. Once again, God does not react to pleas for intervention; God is already working for the possibility of wholeness whether human beings prehend or come to awareness of those possibilities or not.

Finally, Process-Relational theologians emphasize that while God may not be able to act as a unilateral agent for healing, God may call individuals to healing work in counseling, medicine, technology, and science to facilitate healing in the world (Mesle 1993, 122; Smith and Yong 2010, 44). God's role is to increase the freedom and responsibility of creatures. Instead of healing unilaterally, God's power is the power to persuade creatures to act as loving agents of healing in the human body and in the world as a whole. For Pentecostal-Charismatic theologians, who strive to "take scripture seriously," Process-Relational theology provides a metaphysically grounded, albeit naturalistic, perspective that may support what Robin Collins calls the "co-creator" model of prayer (2011, 163). In this synthesis, God is not absent from the process of answering prayer, but neither is God the unilateral agent in doing so. Thereby, the possibility of scientifically sensitive, metaphysically grounded healing miracles emerges without succumbing to the extremes of scientific materialism or dualistic supernaturalism (Smith and Yong 2010).

#### MIRACLES AND METAPHYSICS

The similarities and differences between Pentecostal-Charismatic and Process-Relational perspectives on miracles have the potential to mutually transform both traditions. Because there exists within the

Pentecostal-Charismatic movements an antipathy and resentment toward science and rationality, Process-Relational interpretations of miracles may serve to temper such sentiments (Olson 2006, 29). Pentecostals need to reflect on their experiences and spend more time formulating coherent theologies to explain those experiences (McGee 2010). On the other hand, Process-Relational theology may benefit from the enthusiasm, exuberance, and expectation of miracles that characterizes the Pentecostal-Charismatic movements.

*A Definition of "Miracle".* Some extreme factions of the Pentecostal-Charismatic movements have placed disproportionate emphasis on the "bizarre, unusual, the dramatically miraculous elements, as if miracles are to be identified with these and these alone" (Culpepper 1977, 75). However, as Brown acknowledges, white missionaries have put more emphasis on "dramatic and miraculous" healings than their indigenous counterparts, namely for the sake of evangelization (2011, 111). Pentecostalism need not be "confined to the realm of the miraculous but must also be expanded to include God's providential work through natural processes and efforts" (Macchia 2006, 1136). Process-Relational theology provides a metaphysical and scientifically sensitive framework for such an interpretation of Pentecostal-Charismatic experience.

Ultimately, the result of a comparison of the Pentecostal-Charismatic and Process-Relational interpretations of miracles must be a thoughtful reconsideration and theological reformulation of what constitutes a "miracle." Miracles must be defined as less than the bizarre and unusual, but at the same time defined as so much more. Thus, Pentecostal-Charismatic and Process-Relational theologians alike may strive to construct a non-supernatural, metaphysically grounded theology of miracles that accounts for scientific methodology, but is not bound by scientific materialism alone.

Such a theology may begin by reinterpreting the ways in which science and theology might interact in terms of miracles. For example, indeterminacy in the quantum world has been heralded as a potential opening for divine action, and thus for miracles. In such instances, some theologians claim that minute changes at the chaotic, subatomic level, influenced by God, may lead to macrophysical outcomes. However, Clayton warns that if chaos theory turns out to be a "subset of deterministic physics," then attempts at identifying it with divine action could ultimately "turn out to be another 'God of the gaps' strategy" (Clayton and Simpson 1997, 196). Clayton cautions that even though science has not yet fully described what occurs at the subatomic level, it may be unwise to leap to the conclusion that it is precisely at that level and through those causal mechanisms that God works in the world. Nevertheless, Process-Relational theologians remain open to dramatic novelty, even "paranormal (or miraculous) phenomena" in ways that scientific materialism is not (Cobb 2003, 28).

Although Process-Relational theologians affirm that the past wields powerful naturalistic causal efficacy, such an observation is merely a quasi-deterministic concession that indeed has much empirical support (Cobb 2003, 16). However, Clayton argues emphatically that scientific materialists are “wrong about the impossibility of miracles” on the grounds of naturalistic causation alone (Clayton and Simpson 1997, 177). Clayton notes that the “space for divine activity” should not be reduced by scientific progress, and that theologians should embrace science as a means by which divine activity, both in the world and with humankind, may eventually be empirically identified (Clayton and Simpson 1997, 178). Therefore, in terms of verification of miracles, scientific methodology that leads to empirical evidence can be quite helpful, but not as an end in and of itself.

For example, the empirical studies conducted by Brown are constructive steps in this direction (Brown 2011, 2012; Brown et al., 2010). However, while Keener thoroughly documented human accounts of miracles in the global Pentecostal-Charismatic movements, those accounts remain far from empirically verified and largely anecdotal, even if they are corroborated by eyewitnesses (2011). An alternative approach is necessary to bridge the gap between attributing miracles to supernatural intervention and subjecting miracles to established scientific laws. Understanding miracles in nonsupernatural terms, while affirming them as signs pointing to God’s activity in the world, may be an approach that both Pentecostal-Charismatic and Process-Relational theologians can affirm.

Kirk McDermid concurs with Sheldrake that scientific materialists largely reject proposals that seek to reconcile scientific laws and miracles, because of an uncritical subscription to scientific materialism (2008). Namely, McDermid observes that such scientists affirm that the natural world must be a closed causal system; on the contrary, he also cautions against “toothless” metaphysical systems that reject naturalism entirely (2008, 128). Oord agrees that interventionist language, in like manner, reinforces the idea of causal closure (2012). Instead of choosing between two extremes, it is possible to affirm the primary role of apparent physical causation without excluding the possibility of nonphysical causes within the naturalistic scope of reality.

According to such a proposal, God does not work by overriding or disrupting otherwise stable scientific laws; the outcomes of God’s activity are observable because they are not “law-governed in a deterministic way” (Koperski 2011, 48). Thus, “law-abiding miracles” are not necessarily incompatible with Pentecostal-Charismatic or Process-Relational theology and such compatibility is most possible at the metaphysical level. When miracles occur, they may be law-abiding but “extremely unusual and apparently law-violating” occurrences (McDermid 2008, 145). Bruce Epperly describes such surprising events as “relational rather than unilateral, and

lawful rather than arbitrary” (2012). If miracles occur according to this formula, then their physical effects must be nonsupernatural and not outside the realm of scientific investigation. However, they must also speak to a deeper aspect of reality than materialism is able to explain in purely causal terms.

In terms of identifying miracles, it may be that miracles do not violate nature, but “elevate” nature; miraculous healing, for example, conforms to natural processes, but at an accelerated rate (Nichols 2002). In like manner, Wolfhart Pannenberg argued that miracles need not be regarded as violations of universal laws of nature, but as unusual occurrences that serve as “signs” pointing to God’s activity in creation (2002). John Polkinghorne also affirmed the notion of miracles as “signs,” being unnatural only in terms of prior expectations for natural occurrences (2002). Pentecostal-Charismatic theologians generally affirm that miracles are indeed “signs,” but it is the language by which such signs are evoked within the global Pentecostal-Charismatic movements that leads to supernatural explanations. It is possible, then, that miracles are glimpses of God’s loving activity in the world that do not require an appeal to supernaturalism for explanation (Smith and Yong 2008; Smith and Yong 2010, 47).

From the Process-Relational perspective, Cobb suggested that when confronted with science, Christians began to interpret miracles not as “astounding occurrences” but as violations of the “laws of nature” (2003, 14). Throughout their history, Pentecostals and Charismatics, have come to uncritically understand miracles as unilateral interventions by God that violate or conflict with the observable laws of nature (Cobb 2003, 15). However, miracles need not be understood in these terms. With advancements such as “the new physics” and postmodernism, the scientific world can reconsider the presuppositions of scientific naturalism just as Christians can reconsider their presupposition of supernaturalism. Such considerations provide the basis upon which “natural laws” can be understood as statistical averages; that is, the laws appear to be stable and predictable because they reliably produce consistent results (Cobb 2003, 15).

Therefore, miracles, or events that occur out of the ordinary, are possible in Process-Relational theology: however, what seems to be a miracle simply demonstrates the statistical nature of otherwise stable physical laws (Cobb 2003, 15). That is, if something unusual occurs, instead of immediately identifying it as a supernatural miracle, it should instead be identified as a statistical variation of otherwise considerably stable natural laws. Yong affirms a similar possibility, in that God need not override the regularly observed physical laws in order for miracles to occur; instead, new laws might simply emerge as new possibilities come into being (2011). In either case, the conclusion is the same: miracles can be conceived in ways that are consistent with scientific understanding, but also compatible with theological insights.

While Process-Relational theologians believe that miracles are possible, they are able to define miracles in scientifically sensitive, metaphysically grounded terms. Most succinctly, Process-Relational theologians define miracles as events whereby God dramatically but “noncoercively affects a creature or situation” (Oord 2010, 149). Such a definition need not be bound to supernatural terms. For Mesle to immediately attribute what seem to be miracles to direct supernatural intervention is “demeaning to God and deadly to theology” (1993, 119). Thus, for Pentecostals and Charismatics, the problem is not a passionate expectation of miracles, but an overemphasis on supernatural intervention driven by an exaltation of divine power. According to Process-Relational theists, however, God does not act with coercive power, but with persuasive love. In so doing, God does not, and cannot, unilaterally disrupt the physical world.

The “packaged revivals” of Pentecostal-Charismatic televangelists often focus disproportionately on divine power (Bowman and McDaniel 2006, 12). Such overemphasis on divine power in Pentecostal-Charismatic theology suggests that God can, and does, unilaterally disrupt natural processes on behalf of individual prayers, petitions, and practices. However, Process-Relational theologians are emphatic in their view that God does not act coercively to supernaturally control the world (Mesle 1993, 64). As a Pentecostal theologian, Yong acknowledges that the Process-Relational emphasis on persuasive rather than coercive power has compatibility with Pentecostal-Charismatic theology, but rejects the fact that it is due to God being the chief exemplification of any metaphysical principle (2010, 63). Nevertheless, such rudimentary points of agreement establish a foundation for more comprehensive dialogue: if God’s power is understood in non-supernatural, persuasive rather than coercive terms, the exaggerated claims of miracles in the Pentecostal-Charismatic movements can be tempered, but not extinguished.

According to Roger Olson, the statistics of miracles purported by some Pentecostal-Charismatic evangelists and faith healers are, at times, “inflated” and many of the claims regarding healings are “exaggerated if not invented” (2006, 28). Similarly, “overemphasizing the power” of God to work supernatural miracles “often leads to bitter disappointment and disillusionment when that power is not evidently and immediately manifested” (Anderson 2004, 198; Drees 2010). In due course, such disappointment may stifle the spiritual fervor of the Pentecostal-Charismatic movements worldwide. Thus, Process-Relational theologians conclude that carelessly purporting supernatural miracles is not only unhealthy, but “cruelly unkind” (Mesle 1993, 118). There is not only a theological, but moral and ethical problem that must be overcome (Drees 2010).

On the other hand, while Process-Relational metaphysics can inform the Pentecostal-Charismatic experience of miracles, Process-Relational theology, and consequently science itself, can be enriched by

Pentecostal-Charismatic spirituality. Epperly expresses a unique Process-Relational interpretation of the Pentecostal reality:

Pentecost calls us to believe ‘more’ rather than ‘less’ about divine activity in the world and our ability to experience God’s dramatic, as well as gentle, movements in our lives. Pentecost challenges us to become Progressive Pentecostals who expect great things from God and great things from ourselves. (2008)

The minimization of divine activity is, according to Epperly, a serious flaw in the “waning theology of twentieth century liberal Protestantism.” Many individuals are attracted to the Pentecostalism not because of a desire for miraculous healing, but because of its deep, rich, and different worldview (Brown 2012, 174). Consequently, Epperly proposes a deeper natural theology in which God is ever present and always creatively at work within the universe.

Thus, Process-Relational theologians such as Epperly do not deny that God is at work in the world, but note that miracles are problematic when they support the notion that God has the power to unilaterally intervene (Mesle 1993, 118). Instead, Pentecostals and Charismatics may come to embrace the metaphysical naturalism of Process-Relational theology, which is not only compatible with science, but has the capacity to expand the resources of science beyond the limits of scientific materialism.

For example, Cobb identified a Process-Relational affinity toward the possibility of a deeper naturalism that is enriched by the spiritual, non-material aspects of reality:

... the flat dismissal of faith-healing is no longer universal. But the healing miracles are still treated peripherally and skeptically for the most part despite their central role in the gospel accounts. Process thought argues that most of these laws are literary generalizations about the habits of nature when primarily physical events are not influenced by primarily mental ones. How mental states affect behavior of physical objects (beginning with human bodies) requires separate investigation. Stories of extraordinary influence deserve respectful consideration. (2006, 26)

Process-Relational theologians affirm that the mental and the physical aspects of reality are intimately interrelated. An *a priori* limit need not be placed on what people of extraordinary spiritual awareness may accomplish. Thus by synthesizing Pentecostal-Charismatic and Process-Relational theologies, especially if the language of supernaturalism in the former is revised, the question of miracles may be framed in a new way. Quite simply, miracles are reminders that God is working in, not upon, the world (Oord 2010, 148). Miracles, then, are not supernatural disruptions of the natural world, but expressions of God’s loving, persuasive activity within it. If this is the case, then miracles are nonsupernatural and remain, at least in terms of their physical effects, within the scope of scientific investigation.

For Process-Relational theologians, a miracle occurs through divine or human influence, and thus there is an expectation that such influences are “subtle and gradual” (Cobb 2003, 15). However, when changes in nature are “rapid and dramatic” a miracle is often attributed to the observation or experience (Cobb 2003, 15). In other words, when God’s influence is profound and such influence leads to “striking consequences,” a metaphysically grounded, nonsupernatural miracle has occurred (Cobb 2003, 16). God can influence the world in the way that the human mind can influence the body, but the body is also comprised of physically determined causal mechanisms that cannot always be controlled or coerced by the mind. Thus while sickness and disease form part of the reality of the human body, the mind can have profound affects, but not ultimate control, over the body’s condition.

In this way, Process-Relational theologians support the possibility for physical healing of the body influenced by the mind or even by God. By understanding the human mind as an intrinsic part of the human body and the human being as finding its existence in God, it might be possible to see how both God and the human mind can together influence “healthier cells to work” (Mesle 1993, 64). Interrelatedness is a key concept in Process-Relational theology and is essential to understanding the possible influence of God, mind, or spirit on matter; however, in any case, whether material or nonmaterial, each factor is only one among many interrelated factors. The possibility of one mind influencing another or God influencing a human body is because the “interrelatedness of all things” may “fit” together, at times, in surprising ways (Cobb 2003, 16). Thus prayer for healing may lead to a miracle when such influence affects one person as a result of the prayers of another. Further, Cobb notes that profoundly spiritual individuals have:

demonstrated that psychic states have a great effect on the condition of the soma. Spiritual healing both of one’s own body and of others is a reality. This makes sense from a process perspective, since there is every reason to engage in spiritual practices that make for a healthy body (2003, 101).

Thus, prayer can aid in the healing process and lead to physical effects in the body (Cobb 2003, 86). Experiences that are central to Pentecostal-Charismatic theology, such as prayer and healing, share commonalities with the metaphysics of Process-Relational theology. Process-Relational theologians affirm physical healing through nonmaterial, spiritual, or psychic influence, but not through supernatural intervention. While Process-Relational theologians see the mechanisms for healing in a much different way, there is demonstrable agreement with the intended ends of Pentecostal-Charismatic theology: God influences, but does not coerce, the world.



*What Kind of Miracles Might Human Beings Value Most?* Although the exuberance and fervor of the Pentecostal-Charismatic movements is admirable, its sometimes exaggerated and unsubstantiated claims of supernatural intervention, miraculous healing, “signs and wonders,” and the like, lead to high expectations that may result in disappointment and despair (Yong 2011, 242–47; Anderson 1991, 41–46, 104–20; Anderson 2000, 239, 244–55; Cox 2001, 298–99). While the Pentecostal-Charismatic movements can broaden the limits of scientific materialism, at the same time they must move beyond their own limitations bound by supernatural and interventionist assumptions. In such a conception of nonsupernatural miracles, the lines of distinction between superstition and spirituality can be more precisely drawn (Drees 2010, 39).

As the Pentecostal-Charismatic movements continue to grow in the non-Western, Developing World, the promulgation of unrealistic expectations concerning God’s power to work miracles is unsustainable and will ultimately lead to rejection of the Christian message (Cobb 2003, 8). The Pentecostal-Charismatic movements not only need a sound metaphysic to temper their excesses, but they also need the methodology of science as a check to validate their claims.

A synthesis of the Pentecostal-Charismatic and Process-Relational theologies of miracles may prevent antipathy toward God yet at the same time encourage a healthy perspective toward God’s activity in the world (Collins 2011, 181). When defined in nonsupernatural terms, miracles are simple reminders that God’s “noncoercive love” can make “real and sometimes astonishing” differences in the lives of human beings (Oord 2010, 148). Miracles are simply extraordinary manifestations of, as Pentecostals contend, the presence of the Spirit of God (Yong 2011, 47). Such formulations are not only highly compatible with one another, but may perhaps lead to a healthy and robust theology of miracles for both traditions.

The solution is not to reject miracles out of hand or to do away with miraculous language entirely. Neither must the effectiveness of scientific methodology be abandoned in order to move beyond the limitations of scientific materialism. In fact, it would not be constructive to suggest that believers should not expect God to work in extraordinary and unexpected ways or to suggest that scientists should compromise their methodological commitments. The vitality of the Pentecostal-Charismatic movements, tempered by the more philosophically and scientifically sensitive metaphysics of Process-Relational theology may lead to a new, but perhaps more sustainable theology of miracles. Enterprises that embrace a Pentecostal-Charismatic, but scientifically informed, perspective may lead to new insights of purpose and meaning in contemporary science (Smith and Yong 2010, 58). Process-Relational theology aids in such synthesis.

Ultimately, the question of miracles may need to focus less on whether miracles are possible and instead focus more on what kind of miracles

human beings might value most. If miracles are unexpected signs of God's loving influence in the world, then by all means, both traditions may affirm such a definition (Oord 2010; Smith 2008; Smith and Yong 2010). God is one factor among many other factors in the natural world, but when God's influence is profound and its effects are experienced, human beings may joyfully perceive such activity as "miraculous." Thus, human perceptions of nonsupernatural miracles may aid in the scientific enterprise to observe and understand the composition, function, and meaning of reality. By mutually engaging a theology of nonsupernatural, metaphysically grounded miracles, Pentecostal-Charismatic and Process-Relational theologians may collaborate to establish the groundwork for creative scientific enterprises, especially in the non-Western world where Pentecostalism continues to experience its most rapid growth. Such perspectives may eventually lead to cutting-edge discoveries about the fundamental nature of, and God's interaction with, reality itself.

While this article lays the groundwork for dialogue between Pentecostal-Charismatic and Process-Relational theologians on the possibility of miracles, significant future research needs to be conducted. Pentecostals and Charismatics must continue to come to terms with their claims and formulate philosophically, metaphysically, and scientifically grounded explanations for their experiences. Miracles are at the center of this struggle and Process-Relational theology may provide the most appropriate framework for accomplishing such goals. At the same time, as the Pentecostal-Charismatic movements continue to grow in the developing world, their theologians and adherents must find new and creative ways to not only interface with contemporary science, but to realistically and practically expand the boundaries of scientific materialism. Such an expansion may well include the possibility of nonsupernatural miracles, but formal observation, identification, and documentation remains a critical aspect of future research. Further, translating a nonsupernatural theology of miracles to laypersons in ways that preserve and promote vibrant spirituality will be a challenge for theologians in both traditions. Moving such discussions out of the academy and into everyday religious practice will not be easy or expeditious. Together, however, Pentecostal-Charismatic and Process-Relational theologians might formulate just what constitutes a nonsupernatural miracle, why human beings might value such occurrences above supernaturalism, and how such new perspectives might contribute to the religion-science dialogue worldwide.

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