

# APOLOGETICS PODCAST SERIES

## MIRACLES IN THE NEW TESTAMENT & TIMES

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### RECAP OF EPISODE ON MIRACLES IN GENERAL

- This episode will go beyond the general idea of miracles [insert lame joke about miracles going beyond nature here] but already it is good to review a few ideas about the theory before giving a few examples.
- Also, we have to take stock of the value of examples.
  - Examples are only anecdotes, particular incidents/experience which provide evidence, but do not establish a general rule on their own.
  - It is the combination of these that gains value beyond themselves (just as the Scientific Method, aka Inductive Reasoning, produces greater knowledge of general principles).
- Recall what a miracle is : an effect beyond created causes, so having God as the author.
  - It is not a violation of the laws of nature, but a change in the course of nature
  - As such, a miraculous action may prevent certain natural processes from happening, just like medicine can stop a disease, or like a support can prevent an object from falling.
  - Only difference is that a created cause is not causing this effect.
- Miracle workers are, at best, an “occasional cause” (not that they sometimes happen or sometimes don’t)— they can prompt the effect, or be the occasion for the effect to happen, but a real miracle only has God for it’s cause.
- There is need to demonstrate three things with any apparent miracle:
  - Historical Truth : Did the effect happen?
    - This uses the same evidence-based approach (historical science) for the truth of any historical event, which relies on eye-witnesses, written reports, etc.
  - Philosophical Truth : Is this effect actually a miracle?
    - Here we use scientific principles (natural, social, psychological, historical, etc.) to exclude any reasonable natural (secondary) cause.
  - Relevant Truth: So what? What the miracle is trying to show.
    - Not really a “scientific” question, but a contextual one.
    - Does the worker of the miracle claim he is trying to show something
    - What is the context of the miracle

### VALUE OF LOOKING AT MIRACLES IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

- Recall from the episode on Miracles in General that the purpose of a miracle will always be something supernatural. This can include:
  - Testifying to God’s Goodness or His anger at certain evils,
  - Recommending the practice of a virtue,
  - Manifesting the holiness of a person,
  - Authenticating a message from God, or a messenger,
  - Testifying to a claim to speak for God, or another supernatural claim.

St Thomas Aquinas says that “in order to confirm those truths that exceed natural knowledge ... [God] gives visible manifestations to works that surpass the ability of all nature. Thus there are wonderful cures of illnesses, there is the raising of the dead ... and what is more wonderful, there is inspiration given to

human minds, so that the simple and unlearned persons, filled with the gifts of the Holy Ghost, come to possess instantaneously the highest wisdom and the most prompt eloquence.”

- Applying this to the New Testament, we see Our Lord at various times work miracles
- The result of working these miracles is several-fold, but Scripture does tell us in certain cases Our Lord’s purpose:
  - In Matthew 8, Jesus comes to heal a paralytic man, and when the Scribes take scandal in his telling the man his sins are forgiven, Our Lord works the healing in an open and miraculous way in order to show the Divine power given to him
    - *“But that you may know that the Son of man has power on earth to forgive sins, (then said he to the man sick of the palsy,) Arise, take up thy bed, and go into thy house. And he arose, and went into his house. And the multitude seeing it, feared, and glorified God that gave such power to men.” (Matt. 8.6-8)*
  - Thus Our Lord makes the claim He has received power from God to forgive sins, and works the miracle to testify to this claim.
  - Here also we see another result (and purpose) of the miracle. To cause men to honor God, by testifying to His Mercy. (Though Christ does not make this explicit.)
- In fact all miracles will have for their ultimate purpose to cause honor for God, even if only indirectly and after the more immediate purpose is fulfilled.
- While the New Testament writers record these miracles to teach people, there is also value in their being recorded in writing, because we can work backwards
  - If we can historically establish the truth of a miracle without the Gospel, and see historical evidence, we can work backwards to then show the reliability of the Gospel or other writings as historical sources based on eye-witness testimony (first- or second-hand).
- The Rationalists and Modernists both try to downplay or deny the supernatural aspects of the Gospel, primarily by denying the miracles of Christ, but trying to respect His “philosophy” or other “noble” aspects, but denying His Divinity.
  - For example, Thomas Jefferson redrafted the Gospels for himself to exclude the miracles
  - The Modernists will frequently try to speak of the “Christ of History” and the “Christ of Faith” to separate the supernatural aspect of His life from the natural ones.
    - Often such deny the Resurrection physically, to say such things as “Christ rose in the hearts of his faithful”
  - The value of the miracles in the New Testament can also be shown by the dependence of the Gospel story and History of Christ on these phenomenon.
    - To this point, no contemporary of the Apostles or Gospel writers, nor for many centuries after denied the historical fact of Christ’s miracles.
      - Even the Jews, who would have everything to gain by denying the miracles of Christ, only ever attributed to these miracles some evil purpose or natural explanation.
      - For instance, the Talmud suggests Christ’s healing power came from gnostic knowledge learned in Egypt, despite the instantaneous healing of many which even secret medical knowledge cannot produce.
    - In a more modern way we could say that the Gospel without miracles is like the Lord of the Rings without the ring:
      - *The Dark Lord Sauron during the Second Age wanted to gain dominion over the free peoples of Middle-earth, so disguised as "Lord of Gifts" he aided the Elven smiths and their leader to forge the Rings of Power. His plan was then to create the One Ring to rule them all, but then decided not to, for some reason.*

- *So there remained the three rings of power, with nothing stronger than these. Thus Sauron was unable to control the other rings of power, and never became dependent on the One Ring, and despite now being less powerful, decided to wage war on the Elves. He is defeated and killed by Isildur, who cuts off his hand, for no apparent reason. Isildur is entranced by nothing, but nevertheless decides to challenge the Orcs to some wrestling. It does not go well, but since there is no ring to put on to disappear, he is simply killed and the non-existent ring doesn't end up buried in a riverbank to be found later.*
- *One day a hobbit named Déagol and his friend Sméagol are fishing. Déagol catches nothing, but out of the blue Sméagol, entranced by nothing, asks for a birthday gift. Déagol doesn't have anything to give Sméagol so Sméagol strangles his friend in order to take nothing for himself. Sméago, now Gollum, hides in the caves under the Mistry Mountains, just because, hunting Orcs with his bare hands.*
- *Then one day, Bilbo Baggins finds nothing in the tunnels near Gollum's lair. Gollum sees Bilbo and decides to go get nothing to help him kill and eat Bilbo. He chases Bilbo around the caves, and Bilbo turns invisible, just like you do when being chased by a 500 year old cave dweller, because of nothing.*
- *Bilbo gets tired of the burden of carrying nothing and wants to retire from it, so passes nothing to Frodo under the care of Gandalf, who has come to make sure Frodo can carefully take care of nothing and do what he must do, since Gandalf knows from Gollum, that Sauron knows that Frodo has nothing.*
- *To prevent Sauron from regaining nothing, Frodo set out with several companions to destroy nothing in the fires of Mount Doom. They begin a fraught adventure into a forboding and certainly leathal-looking land, several being killed in this gargantuan task, for no purpose at all, except to fill out several hundred pages of a book and hours of film.*
- *The end.*
- e.g. If Lazarus was not raised from the dead, Jesus would not have gained the fame for the Palm Sunday entrance. It was the raising of Lazarus plus Palm Sunday that finally made the Jews determine to kill Jesus. If Lazarus was not raised, there was no reason to execute Jesus. But the Jews did decide to kill Jesus over these, so they (his enemies) believed Lazarus was raised from the dead. (Miracle is the Ring).

### MIRACLES FROM THE NEW TESTAMENT ITSELF : FEEDING OF THE 5,000

- Our Lord is recorded twice to miraculously multiply bread in order that several thousand people eat from a miniscule amount of initial food.
  - Firstly 5,000 people at Tabgha, later 4,000 people at an unspecified location.
  - Let us focus on the first of these, since it is attested to by all the Gospel writers. We will take this and show evidence for it happening, and also what value it has for Apologetics
- **Historical Truth:**
  - The first miraculous multiplication is attested to by all of Gospel writers, in greater or lesser detail.
  - The accounts provide us several details which history can show accurate:
    - The event happens after the death of John the Baptist, so all of his followers would now be coming out to the desert to see Jesus, not John.
    - St Luke, relying on research for his Gospel, identifies the place as being near Bethsaida (Tabgha is), so we have a specific location.

- The Gospels claim Jesus withdrew to a desert place, and while Tagbha was a settlement, it was not inhabited until the fifth century, confirmed by St Jerome, so the details match.
- Jesus has withdrawn from the crowds, which would have come by foot to find him. Taghbha is only a few miles from Caphernum, yet far enough that without modern roads, the journey would have been at least an hour.
  - By the end of a day of walking to search out Jesus, then hearing His preaching, and perhaps with other miracles performed, It would have been an hour to return home for food.
  - Thus, the scenario makes sense that these people would have come without food (it was relatively close).
  - At the same time, it was also too far to just go back to get food for everyone, as the roundtrip would be more than two hours, transport of such food difficult, and even just sending the crowds back would have seen the more feeble unable to make it.
  - The miracle was witnessed by thousands of people, who kept the memory of the location, which was passed down through tradition for many years, even though only generally recorded in Scripture.
- **Philosophical Truth:**
  - The difficulty of bringing sufficient food for 5,000 people is obvious.
    - If the Apostles brough sufficient food, the crowd would have seen it, and known it was not a miracle, so the resulting fame would make no sense.
    - If everyone already had food, there was no purpose for the miracle, and the Modernist reading that Jesus prompted people to share their food, would also not be memorable enough to have passed down the location for generations
  - The completeness of the feeding, plus leftovers, makes the miracle obvious.
    - Everyone eats as much as he wants, not just a little bit. The satiation means it was not just a small morsel, and thus clearly a multiplication of the original.
    - Seven loaves create twelve baskets of crumbs after everyone has eaten, so there was plenty left, and more than what they began with. This means the miracle remained obvious after the feeding, so it was not merely some hypnosis that the people were not hungry.
  - Our Lord later chastizes those who keep coming to Him, not because of what His miracle prove (His Divinity and Messiahship) but merely because He fed them. (John 6).
    - The people would not be following if He did not feed them,
  - No natural causes can explain the multiplication of loaves.
- **Relevant Truth:**
  - The kind of miracle demonstrates an implied claim to be the New Moses, but greater yet.
    - Moses called down for the Israelites manna (Bread from Heaven) in the desert
    - Our Lord multiplies bread and feeds the multitude in the desert, showing He is a Prophet, like Moses, and a leader.
    - He goes further by giving them fish.
    - Like manna they eat what is needed, but unlike this, the bread can be gathered up and kept, showing a greater miracle.
  - The miracle shows Christ has a Divine-like power over matter, to be able to create more than existed previously.

- The miracle is placed right before the discourse on the Eucharist (Bread of Life), in which Christ will instruct the 5,000 to eat His flesh and drink His blood.
  - This scandalized 1,000 who leave Him, and are not present for the second miracle of the feeding of the 4,000.
- It testifies to Christ's Mercy and Goodness.
- It provides clear historical markers for the truth of the Gospel.

## MIRACLES FROM THE NEW TESTAMENT ITSELF : PHYSICAL MIRACLES OF CHRIST

### • Historical Truth:

- If we establish the historical reliability of the Gospels, 40 specific miracles are recorded.
- Additional miracles are mentioned by Sts Matthew and Luke.
- These miracles are nothing like those mentioned in the Apocryphal Gospels or other later works, showing a type difference between those of the Gospel and others invented by later authors.
  - In the Gospels Christ always works physical miracles out of Charity or Mercy
  - In the Apocryphal works, Christ works miracles for His own benefit, or vain reasons.
- The enemies of Christ and the Church accepted the historical truth of these miracles
  - According to Eusebius,<sup>1</sup> people were compelled to believe because many of those raised from the dead lived well into the second century during the time of Hadiran (117–135).
- Returning to the Lord of the Rings without the Ring:
  - If no Sabbath Day healings, then no violation of Sabbath, and no controversy, but there was controversy
  - Why the crowds? They came to Jesus because of the healing and feeding (physical miracles).
    - They would not follow if he did not perform miracles.
    - The Pharisees were unable to stop them, but if no miracles ...
  - Why the bitterness of the people on Good Friday?
    - They were actually expecting the victory over the Romans and the establishing of the Messianic Kingdom on earth.

### • Philosophical Truth:

- *N.B.* We do not need to establish the truth of every miracle. A few proven miracles prove Christ status as a Divine Messenger with Divine Power, and this authenticates less certain miracles.
- First exclude the natural
  - No natural power can:
    - Raise the dead,
    - Multiply Bread and Fish
    - Cure diseases at a distance, or cure instantaneously
- We can exclude fraud due to the number and variety of these miracles, worked on animals, men, devils, in both public and private, with both friends and enemies as witnesses.
- Next, Exclude Diabolical causes (recall Christ's healings are accepted but he is accused of casting out demons by the power of the devil, Matt. 12.24):

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<sup>1</sup> Ecclesiastical History, Bk. 4, Ch. 3-4

- Devils cannot raise the dead
- The circumstances of these miracles show Christ's eminent holiness, and never show any unbecoming circumstances or situation. The miracles endorse Christ's mission and doctrine which is not something the devils would ever support.
- **Relevant Truth:**
  - Normally, Christ points to His miracles as proof of His mission, and proof God the Father has sent Him<sup>2</sup>
  - Sometimes a specific miracle supports a specific doctrine
    - Mt 9.6 : Paralytic, and forgiveness of sins
    - Jn 11.41 : Raising of Lazarus : To believe He is God
  - Christ demands Faith in Himself before working miracles, and miracle is performed as a reward for Faith.

### MIRACLES FROM THE NEW TESTAMENT ITSELF : THE RESURRECTION

- While we could focus on many of these miracles in the Gospels, it is fitting that we cover in the limited time the greatest miracle, the Resurrection.
- It is the most spectacular and convincing of all. If it is false, all can be dismissed.<sup>3</sup>
- It is intimately connected to His mission as proof that His Sacrifice was acceptable to God the Father, and that for Christians, to carry our crosses will lead to glory and God will raise man to a higher state.
- Thus it is the most important miracle for the Apostles.
- **Relevant Truth:**
  - Christ foretold of His Resurrection as proof of His Mission<sup>4</sup>
  - Christ claimed<sup>5</sup> that He had power to lay down His life and take it up again and received command from His Father.
  - Christ was killed for claiming to be God (the Son of God), and he proves the claim by returning after He is killed.
- **Historical Truth:**
  - Here we need to establish that Christ really died and he really rose
  - Christ really died:
    - Gospel writers testify He actually dies (and we can establish historicity of Gospels)
    - Lance wound (size of a man's fist) would have killed Him if not already dead
    - Wrapped in linen soaked in oil for burial would have made breathing impossible if He did not die on the Cross
    - The executioners and enemies of Christ would have made sure of this
    - The centurion testifies Christ has died
    - This fact is testified to by many extra-biblical sources
    - If still alive, how would Christ have escaped being tightly bound and unable to move, let alone roll back a stone.
  - Christ really rose:

<sup>22</sup> Cf. Mt 11.3, Jn 10.24ff., Jn 5.36, Jn 15.24

<sup>3</sup> 1 Cor 15.14

<sup>4</sup> Jn 2.14ff., Mt 12:48ff.

<sup>5</sup> Jn 10.18

- All the Gospels attest to this (one of only two miracles all Gospels testify to, the other being the Multiplication of the Loaves)
- Empty Tomb
- What about possible fraud?
  - The Apostles are terrified and timid, they all ran away, and would never have had the courage to pull this off.
  - The Apostles and those that see the tomb are all surprised and confounded
  - The enemies of Christ (Jews) believed His claim, so posted guards specifically to prevent grave robbery
  - Some of the enemies of Christ are converted by the Resurrected Christ: priests and St Paul.
  - No solid motive can be established for why to perpetuate a fraud.
- Hallucination?
  - Empty Tomb is testified to by enemies of Christ
  - It was not like seeing Elvis or Bigfoot: The Apostles and Disciples walked and talked with Christ, ate with Him, asked questions, we rebuked.
  - There are too many witnessed in too many different circumstances and apparitions.

#### MIRACLES FROM THE NEW TESTAMENT AGE : MORAL MIRACLES

- Recall that a moral miracle is not a miracle in the strict sense where we can see a physical effect, but rather we see some historical event, or circumstance that cannot be explained by normal and typical causes.
- e.g. The endurance of the martyrs: Universal amongst different cultures and socio-economic strata, different degrees of knowledge of Christ, yet all endured martyrdom joyfully and with a holiness that mere human endurance and conviction cannot account for.
- Here we briefly look at the moral miracle of the rapid spread of the Christian Church as proof of its divinity:
  - In Palestine during the Apostolic Era
    - Acts 2.41 : St Peter's first sermon wins 3,000 converts
    - Acts 4.4 : St Peter & St John's miracle win 2,000 more converts
    - Acts 5.14 : St Peter's shadow causes healing and converts
  - Outside Palestine during the Apostolic Era
    - I Peter 1.1: There are many different groups in Asia Minor
    - Apoc 1.11 : Seven Churches in Asia Minor
  - Up to the Edict of Milan
    - Pliny the Younger, governor of Bythinia says the temples are almost empty due to the converts to Christianity.
    - St Irenaeus (125–202): There are churches in Germany, Spain, France and the East in the second century.
    - The Easter Controversy (190) about when to celebrate the Resurrection of Christ shows a confederation of Churches under Pope Victor from Edessa to Lyon, with Rome as it's head
    - Tertullian (late 3<sup>rd</sup> cent.) says Christians have filled all places.
  - Edict of Milan

- In 313, it is estimated that 10% (6-8 million) of the Roman Empire's population is Christian
- This is impressive, but what makes this a moral miracle is the circumstances:
  - Christianity is a new religion which is directly antagonistic to all other religions (exclusive).
  - The other religions have social and political favors attached to belonging
  - Christianity has a demanding moral code opposed to many of the social norms
  - The Christian God is a crucified criminal
  - Christianity at various times oppsed, and violently so, by the State, and it seems the more this happened, the more it spread.
  - Those spreading the religion had no wealth, learning, or political influence (e.g. the Apostles)

## MIRACLES FROM THE NEW TESTAMENT AGE : MIRACLES OF SAINTS

### THE CASE OF FRANÇOIS VIOY-DURY & ST PIERRE-MARIE CHANEL

- St Pierre-Maire Chanel was a Marist missionary to the island of Futuna in the South Pacific. He was know for being very meek and humble. He was dropped off on the island of Futuna on 8 Nov 1837, and worked for 4 years, winning few converts. Eventually, the king's son wished to be baptised, and the King thought this would undermine his power as king and the high priest of the pagan Futunans, so he arranged for Chanel to be killed. The king sent his son-in-law to fix the problem, and he fought with the king's son, and was slightly wounded. He sought help from Chanel, feigning a severe injury, but when the opportunity allowed, he beat the priest to death. Not only did this not deter the son, but within a decade after his martyrdom, the entire island, including the murderer, converted to the Catholic Faith. The islanders modified one of their native dances to become a collective act of penance and the murderer stated his wish to be buried under the road to the Saint's shrine, so people would walk over his grave dishonouring him, when they went to venerate the martyr. (Moral Miracle)
- Because his martyrdom was attested to by many witnesses, St Pierre-Marie Chanel was beatified without needing a miracle to confirm his holiness.
- Many miracles were attributed from 1850 onwards due to his intercession. Some reports do not clearly exclude natural causes, so they were not considered for the Canonization, but two stood out. We will look at the cure of François Violy-Dury, who was cured of permanent blindness after praying to Bl Pierre-Marie Chanel, whose relics were touring France. Violy-Dury was a solidier, and in 1882, was sent to fight a serious fire in the barracks. An explosion cause serious wounds to his face, and completely detached his retinas, so he was rendered permanently and totally blind. In 1890, still being treated in a hospital, he was urged to invoke the intercession of Peter Mary Chanel, and 8 years after the fire that caused his blindness, he was completely healed and regained his sight.
  - **Historical Truth** : Well established that there was a cure, and multiple witnesses make the cure
    - Congregation of Rites and their panel of physicians looked at the case thoroughly and determined
    - Notable that the case for Canonization originally cited another apparent miracle, but the Congregation of Rites rejected this cure as not sufficiently excluding natural causes in 1906.
  - **Philosophical Truth** : Panel of medical experts testify to the impossibility of any natural causes, and the kind of cure excludes the diabolical
  - **Relevant Truth** : Glory of God through the holiness and intercession of St Peter Chanel.



## SAINTS AND INCORRUPTIBILITY

- In vogue recently, due to an alleged miracle in Gower, Missouri, of the remarkable preservation of the remains of Sr Wilhelmina Lancaster, OSB, it is worth speaking briefly about incorruptibility.
  - Since it is for the Church to determine the heroic sanctity of the deceased, and also to judge whether an apparent miracle is worthy of belief, we leave this particular case to the side.
  - It is also important to note that such a miracle as the incorruptibility of the body of someone is, absent natural or diabolic causes, a *gratia gratis datae*—that is, it is a charismatic grace, which is not intended for the good of the person who possess this grace, but for the good of others. Just as with prophecy, it helps others, not the prophet (at least not directly).
  - Incorruptibility is not one of the signs the Church uses to determine a person's holiness, as there are many very holy persons who are Saints, but not incorrupt.
  - Incorruptibility does not constitute one of the needed miracles for canonization.
    - In the process of canonization, the Church seeks out examples of the *intercession* of the person resulting in a physical miracle after their death.
    - The reason here is that if this person is among the glorified in heaven, they can intercede for us, and through their intercession God can work a miracle to confirm their sanctity.
    - The reason miracles worked in this life, or through the preservation of mortal remains is not sufficient for the canonization process, is that possession of some charismatic gift (miracle working or incorruptibility) is not for oneself, but for others, and it is possible for a wicked person to have a charismatic gift (e.g. Caiaphas was a prophet when he declared that Jesus must die for the people, and the Holy Ghost was working through him, but it was to his own detriment and condemnation).
  - Incorruptibility is like any apparent miracle: we must look at the historical, philosophical, and relevant truths.
    - Bodies can be preserved through embalming, or mummification. Even in certain dry and salty conditions, bodies can remain for a very long period of time.
  - That said, the preservation of a human body outside of these marginal cases in which natural processes do not cause decay, could very well be miraculous.
  - There is also a case in New Zealand I know well of Fr Antoine Marie Garin, who was the first parish priest in Nelson, New Zealand. He was renowned for his holiness and sacrificial work in the area for 48 years. He wished to be buried in the parish church, but regulations did not allow this, so he was buried in the local cemetery. Later Catholic built a small chapel in the cemetery in which to bury him, to try to keep his wishes as best they could, and when they opened his grave it was full of water. His body was perfectly intact. He also has not been canonized, nor has the Church ruled on his apparent incorruptibility.
  - Nevertheless, we do have Saints like Mother Seton, Sr Bernadette, St John Newmann (Philadelphia) and others where the Church has determined their sanctity, and also where the Church accepts their incorruptibility.
  - There are also Saints or parts of a Saint's body which were incorrupt for centuries, only then to later corrupt.

## MIRACLES FROM THE NEW TESTAMENT AGE : EUCHARISTIC MIRACLES

- There are at least 32 recorded Eucharistic miracles in which the host or wine at Mass has not only sacramentally become the Body and Blood of Christ, but taken on the appearance of human flesh or blood.
- We can take the example of the Miracle of Lanciano

- Said to have occurred in the 8<sup>th</sup> century in Lanciano, Italy, a monk who doubted transubstantiation, said the Words of Consecration, and the species were physically transformed into flesh and blood.
- The doubt was not about the power, but about the use of unleavened bread. The monk was from the East where leavened bread was used. So the miracle is not just about transubstantiation, but about another doctrinal point and related to a specific question that has been a matter of doubt.
- The relics from the miracle were preserved by the Basilian monks in Lanciano, then given over to the Benedictine, so there is a clear chain of custody.
- The host appears to be a yellow-brown membrane with a hole in the center, the remnants of the wine are five clots.
- In 1970 there was a scientific and medical investigation with modern instruments.
  - The host was found to be human heart tissue
  - The blood was real coagulated blood, of AB type (rare for Palestine in the first century).
  - The host has the same type of blood on it
  - The blood type matches the Shroud of Turin
  - The clots have the same mineral composition and protein composition of real human blood.
  - Blood and flesh in their natural state for 1200 years would undergo decomposition, which these have not.
  - **Historical Truth** : While there is not a clear detail of the original event, there is a clear tradition and chain of custody.
  - **Philosophical Truth** : The scientific analysis shows things that cannot be explained, especially the blood type consistency and preservation for such a long time.
  - **Relevant Truth** : Confirmation of a doctrine, reverence for the Mass and honor for Christ in the Blessed Sacrament.