

# The Scandalous Reason You Struggle With the Supernatural

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[OpenHeaven.com Digest May 14, 2015]

"*Anti-supernaturalism*" has so shaped Western thinking that few have been able to escape its grasp. While the Christian faith, in both thought and expression, is miraculous, many within the broader Protestant tradition have attempted to reconfigure it.

One can find roots of this deep skepticism and doubt in the Great Reformation of the Sixteenth Century.

**Martin Luther** (1483-1546), the Father of the Protestant Reformation, believed that the Gospel and First Letter of John, the Epistles of Paul, and 1 Peter were "*the true and noblest books of the New Testament*". The reason that Luther believed this was because

*"these do not describe many works and miracles of Christ but rather masterfully show how faith in Christ overcomes sin, death, and hell and gives life, righteousness, and blessedness."*<sup>1</sup>

Luther was convinced that believers should be much more focused on Jesus' redemptive work than His miracles (*as if these could be separated*). This was the reason he preferred the Gospel of John over Matthew, Mark, and Luke. John documents many of Jesus' sermons, but only a few of His miracles. Because of this, Luther believed that John was

*"the true, genuine, and chief gospel and is to be preferred over and more highly valued than the other three."*<sup>2</sup>

In other words, Luther suggests that the Gospel of John should be more highly esteemed because it has fewer accounts of healing, deliverance, and miraculous works.

Similarly, **John Calvin** (1509-1564), the principal theologian of the Reformation, argued that "*a faith based on the miraculous is insufficient*".<sup>3</sup> He firmly believed the supernatural could "*not engender authentic faith although men continually claim that it will*".<sup>4</sup> Calvin was persuaded that men are "*almost always mistaken with respect to miracles*".<sup>5</sup> This fierce Reformed theologian shied away from the supernatural; focusing instead on the finer points of doctrine.

Luther and Calvin rose in prominence in an era before the Age of Enlightenment (1650-1780). In the ensuing years, miracles were no longer deemed "reasonable". With a concerted focus on "materialism" and the "scientific method", only that which was measurable was viable. Through this line of thinking, truth is always constrained within the bounds of rationalism.

From Sixteenth Century all the way to the present, Protestant leaders have assumed that the supernatural is merely fantasy. They were persuaded that miracles were little more than the foolishness and presumption of the ignorant. They believed this worldview represented a backward, pre-scientific understanding of the cosmos.

What's intriguing is how much our Western mindsets deviate from the rest of the world. While North Americans are unquestionably skeptical, many other tribes and tongues

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1 – Martin Luther quoted in Paul Althaus (1966) "The Theology of Martin Luther", Fortress: Philadelphia p:83-83

2 – Martin Luther quoted in Paul Althaus (1966) "The Theology of Martin Luther", Fortress: Philadelphia p:83-83

3 – John Calvin (1974) 'Mark 16:20' "Calvin's Commentaries", Baker: Grand Rapids, Michigan

4 – John Calvin (1974) 'John 4:48' "Calvin's Commentaries", Baker: Grand Rapids, Michigan

5 – John Calvin (1974) 'Deuteronomy 13:3' "Calvin's Commentaries", Baker: Grand Rapids, Michigan

believe in the viability of spiritual realms.

Commenting on the widespread beliefs about demonic forces, Dr. Francis MacNutt acknowledges that

*“In every culture except the European (and those influenced by the European, such as our own), I have found that ordinary people have a lively appreciation of spiritual bondage and the reality of demonic forces.”<sup>6</sup>*

The acceptance of spiritual realities is prevalent in every non-Western nation. Does the industrial world, with our reductionism and scientific methodologies really comprehend more of the cosmos than others? Could billions be so mistaken?

The major reason why you struggle with the supernatural is because you're the offspring of Western rationalism and its heritage of unbelief. You are your father's skepticism.

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