Summary of Miracles, Chapters 14-15

Chapter 14 – The Grand Miracle

• The central miracle for Christians is the Incarnation. They say that God became man. Every other miracle prepares for this, or exhibits this, or results from this.
• Every particular Christian miracle manifests at a particular place and moment the character and significance of the Incarnation.
• Miracles aren’t arbitrary. They’re not raids on Nature but rather a planned invasion. The Invader intends conquest and occupation.
• The fitness or credibility of miracles depends on their relationship to the Grand Miracle.
• If the Grand Miracle happened (and we believe it did, of course) it was the central event in the history of the Earth.
• It’s easier to argue on historical grounds that it happened than to show on philosophical grounds the probability of its occurrence.
• The discrepancy between the depth, sanity and shrewdness of Jesus’s moral teaching and the megalomania behind his theology (I and the Father are One) – unless He really is God – has never been gotten over.
• The Incarnation illuminates and pulls together the whole mass of our knowledge.
• What does it mean that God becomes man? How is that possible?
• We can have an inkling when we look at ourselves. Humans bring together something above Nature – reason – with something natural, our bodies.
• Not the same thing as God becoming man, but reflective of it.
• “I do not think,” Lewis says, “anything we do will enable us to imagine the mode of consciousness of the incarnate God.” (Implications for “What would Jesus do?”)
• In the Incarnation, we see the power of the greater to include the less. A cube includes squares, but not vice versa. Organisms embody inorganic propositions (conversion of matter to energy), but minerals in no way act like organisms (reproduction, for example).
• In the Christian story, God descends to reascend. He comes down to come up again and bring the whole ruined world with Him. This is a familiar pattern. An oak releases an acorn, which becomes a new oak. Humans produce sperm and egg, which unite to become an embryo, a baby, a child and then an adult.
• Morally, our desires submit to control or denial but then reascend to fully formed character.
• The pattern is all around us. Go down to go up.
• Seeing the pattern caused many cultures to suppose a “corn-king” who died and rose each year. Christ is more, of course, and altogether different. The very thing that the Nature-religions are all about really happened once, but among people where no trace of Nature-religion existed.
• Christians don’t claim that simply “God” was incarnate in Jesus. They claim that the one true God – the Jahweh of the Jews – descended to Earth. He does the things that Nature-Gods do, but He is not any part of Nature. He is above Nature – supernatural – and one day He will dismantle and make a new heaven and earth. God is the inventor, maker, owner and controller of Nature.
• The Jews were always stopped from the worship of Nature-Gods. At best, they were merely like God, and the destiny of the Jews was to be turned away from likenesses to the Real Thing.
• (We don’t like the idea of a “chosen people.” We’re too democratic for that. But Christianity tells us of a God who searches for us and does something for, to and about us. And the way he does it is undemocratic [at least at first]. He picks out one man, Abraham, and separates him from his natural surroundings. He is the ancestor of a nation that carries the knowledge of the true God. Some in that nation die in the desert, some stay behind in Babylon. The process narrows down to one Jewish girl at prayer, and to her Child.)
• This is like Nature – selective and wasteful. Lots of space, a little matter. Lots of stars, few planets. Lots of species, only one is rational. Within the species, only a few attain excellence of beauty, strength or intelligence.
• This selective process permits competition, arrogance and envy; it also permits modesty and admiration (one of our greatest pleasures).
• The chosen people were chosen for suffering. Mary suffered greatly; Jesus was a man of sorrows.
• Jesus, the Sinless Man, was vicarious. He stood in for us, and we depend on that. Nature also reflects this principle – cat and mouse, bees and flowers, parasite and host, unborn child and mother.
• The Incarnation has, in this chapter, already come in contact with four principles: the composite nature of man, the pattern of descent and ascent, selectiveness, and vicariousness. The first is a fact about the frontier between Nature and Supernature; the others are characteristics of Nature herself.
• The last three principles are evil in the world of selfishness and necessity; they are good in the world of love and understanding.
• Christianity promises a remaking of Nature, all throughout the whole creation. But how can the Nature created by a good God come to be in this condition – imperfect and depraved?
• About imperfection: God created Nature to reach perfection by a process of time. He made Earth without form and void and brought it by degrees to its perfection. We see descent from God to a formless Earth and renascent from the formless to the finished. In that sense, a certain degree of “evolutionism” or “developmentalism” is inherent in Christianity.
• About depravity: It’s due to sin, both of men and supernatural beings.
• To call Nature either “good” or “evil” is boys’ philosophy. Nature has the air of a good thing spoiled.
• Sin was possible because God gave men and angels free will, thus surrendering a portion of his omnipotence (descent) because He saw that from a world of free creatures, even though they fell, He could work out a deeper happiness and a fuller splendor (reascent).
• If the redemption of Man is the beginning of Nature’s redemption, is man the most important thing in Nature? OK to say yes, and he’s the hero of the cosmic drama. Pre-eminence could be not of superiority but of misery and evil. God does for him the great deed of coming for us like the one lost sheep, and we are the species into which Mercy descends. The greater the sin, the greater the mercy: the deeper the death, the brighter the rebirth.
• Death is caused by Satan. It is Satan’s great weapon, and God’s great weapon. Only he who loses his life will save it. Death is the thing Christ came to conquer and the means by which He conquered.
• Death is punishment, a mercy, and a safety device. We ate of the fruit, so we die. It is a mercy because, by willing and humble surrender to it, we undo our act of rebellion and become part of Christ’s death. It is a safety device; if we lived forever, we would over time turn from fallen creatures to absolute fiends.
• The Incarnation explains our laughter and our logic, our fear of the dead and the knowledge that it is somehow good to die.

Chapter 15 – Miracles of the Old Creation

• The fitness of the Christian miracles is that they show invasion by a Power that is not alien. They are what might be expected to happen when she is invaded by a Power who is a sovereign.
• God may have worked miracles through non-Christians. But the Christian miracles are different; they have an organic connection with each other and with the structure of the religion they exhibit.
• Miracles of Christ can be classified in two ways. One way is: miracles of fertility; miracles of healing; miracles of destruction; miracles of dominion over the inorganic; miracles of reversal; miracles of perfecting or glorification. The second way is: miracles of the Old Creation, and miracles of the New Creation.
• When miracles reproduce operations we have already seen on the large scale, they are miracles of the Old Creation. When they bring into focus God’s actions still to come, they are miracles of the New Creation (specifically walking on water, Miracles of Reversal [raising of the dead], and the Miracles of Perfecting and Glory [the Transfiguration, the Resurrection and the Ascension]).
• Was Christ able to do miracles only because He was God or also because He also was perfect man? It doesn’t matter. (But it appears that the powers of redeemed humans will be almost unlimited! We will be made like Him.)
• Christ’s isolation is not that of a prodigy but of a pioneer. He is the first of His kind; He will not be the last.
• Miracles of Fertility – Water into wine; multiplication of fish and loaves; virgin birth. God is always present in generation. No woman ever conceived a child, no mare a foal, without Him. These miracles affirm that reality.
• Miracles of Healing – People admit these miracles happened but are inclined to deny they are miraculous. There is a sense in which no doctor ever heals. The magic is not in the medicine but in the patient’s body, the self-corrective energy of Nature. All who are cured are cured by Him. In these miracles, the Power behind these healings puts on a face and hands.
• Miracle of Destruction – the withering of the fig tree. God does this all the time throughout Nature. No tree dies except because God ceased to do something to it. He is the God of Death because He is the God of Life.
• Miracles of Dominion over the Inorganic – Stilling the sea, walking on water. One is of the Old Creation, one is of the New Creation.