

What does it Mean to say that God Acts in our World?

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Good Shepherd UMC

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- **I. Traditional Beliefs in a God who Acts**
- **II. Four Ways of approaching the issue**
- **III. Evaluation of the approaches that
accept the reality of Divine Action**
- **IV. A Final Issue: Miracles**

Wolfgang Pannenberg

Gerhard von Rad "was able to speak of the stories of the Old Testament as if they were about real life—much more real than the secular life that we experience otherwise.... His thesis, that God is acting with Israel and with all humanity in history, and that history is constituted by the acts of God, has influenced me more than any other thing that I learned as a student."

Dennis Bielfeldt

“Of what use is a God who cannot really change the course of history or nature, who does not causally explain the existence of life or the universe, or who cannot be causally effective in the process of redemption?”

Philip Clayton

“If a spiritual agent gives rise to a physical effect, then it has brought about physical change without a physical cause or the expenditure of physical energy, and this fractures the natural order in a way that would make science impossible.”

Arthur Peacocke

Changes at the micro-level of molecular organization “are what they are because of their incorporation into the system as a whole, which is exerting specific constraints on its units, making them behave otherwise than they would in isolation.”

Arthur Peacocke

Since "God's own Being is distinct from anything we can possibly know in the world, then God's nature is ineffable and will always be inaccessible to us, so that we have only the resources of analogy to depict how God might influence events."

Nancey Murphy

**God could affect human consciousness
“by stimulation of neurons [in the
brain].... Such stimulation would cause
thoughts to be recalled to mind;
presumably it could cause the occurrence
of new thoughts by coordinated
stimulation of several ideas, concepts, or
images stored in memory.”**

Nancey Murphy

God's participation in every macro-level event "is by means of his governance of the quantum events that constitute each macro-level event."

St. Thomas Aquinas

“The power of a lower agent depends on the power of a superior agent, according as the superior agent gives this power to the lower agent whereby it may act.”
Therefore, “it is not inappropriate for the same effect to be produced by a lower agent and by God: by both immediately, though in different ways (*ab utroque immediate, licet alio et alio modo*).”

Etienne Gilson

“The universe, as represented by St. Thomas, is not a mass of inert bodies passively moved by a force which passes through them but a collection of active beings, each enjoying the efficacy delegated to it by God along with actual being.”

Elizabeth Johnson

Aquinas's understanding of the relationship between God and the world "accommodates evolutionary science with almost surprising ease. For the basic principle remains the same: God's providential guidance is accomplished in and through the free working of secondary causes."

Elizabeth Johnson

Aquinas's approach avoids any notion that God is "simply a bigger and better secondary cause. [Rather,] the distinction between primary and secondary causality enables thought to hold firm to the mystery of the *Godness* of God and the integrity of creatures, seeing both acting in a unique *concursum*."

John Meier

A miracle may be defined as “(1) an unusual, startling, or extraordinary event that is in principle perceivable by any interested and fair-minded observer, (2) an event that finds no reasonable explanation in human abilities or in other known forces that operate in our world of time and space, and (3) an event that is the result of a special act of God, doing what no human power can do.”

Louis Monden

“This prayer may be full of confidence, or weakened by doubting and vacillation; it may be simple as that of a child, or virile and direct as the prayer of a grown man; hesitant upon the lips of an atheist or unbeliever, but piercing when uttered by a mother who is prepared to reap the gift of heaven by violence.”

St. John of the Cross

“God is not inclined to work miracles.... [Christ] reprimanded the Pharisees because they would not give assent without signs: If you do not see signs and wonders, you do not believe [John 4:48].... The more the soul believes in and serves God without testimonies and signs, the more it extols God, since it believes more of him than signs and miracles can teach.”

Rabbi Eliezer Shore

Real change regularly comes “from below, born out of our struggles and aspirations.... Though it may be less dramatic than a miracle, the transformation it effects is permanent. Furthermore, by acknowledging those areas in our lives that need improvement and by working to repair the broken pieces of both self and world, we must, of necessity, involve everything around us in the process, and thereby refine and uplift the world. This is not a [separate] ‘moment of grace’ but a complete reintegration of every aspect of life.”

Conclusion

Among the aspects of life that can thereby be brought to an ever-fuller, mutual integration are precisely the disciplines of natural science and theology, and that is precisely what you are regularly trying to do with your WesleyNexus website and the various events and programs that you sponsor. I am happy to have been part of your endeavor this evening.

Thank you.