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Books offer very different views on human search for God, miracles

“FULL OF GRACE: MIRACULOUS STORIES OF HEALING AND CONVERSION THROUGH MARY’S INTERCESSION” by Christine Watkins. Ave Maria Press (Notre Dame, Ind., 2010). 224 pp., \$14.95.

“MIRACLE CURES: SAINTS, PILGRIMAGES AND THE HEALING POWERS OF BELIEF” by Robert A. Scott. University of California Press (Berkeley, Calif., 2010). 266 pp., \$24.95.

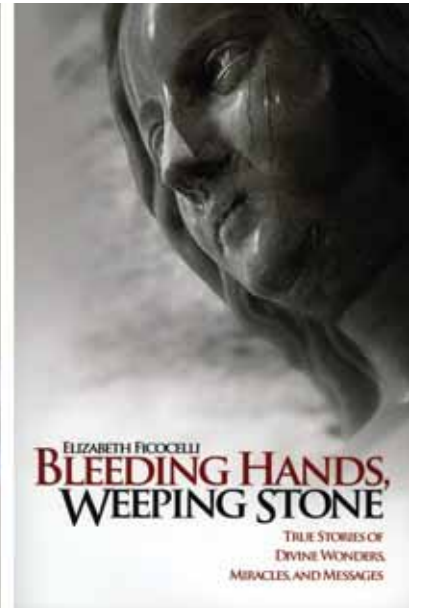
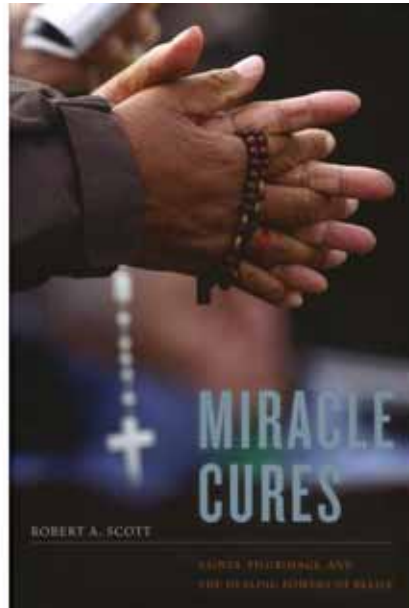
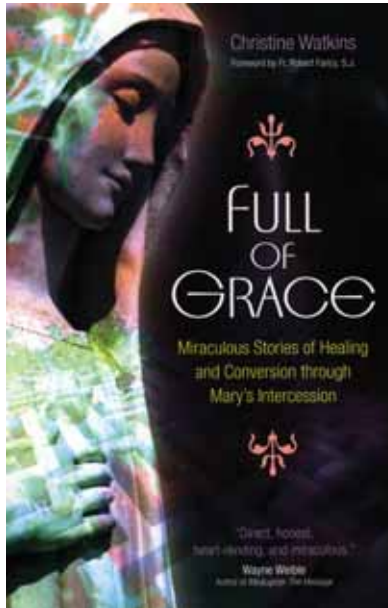
“BLEEDING HANDS, WEeping STONE: TRUE STORIES OF DIVINE WONDERS, MIRACLES AND MESSAGES” by Elizabeth Ficocelli. St. Benedict Press (Charlotte, N.C., 2010). 136 pp., \$12.95.

Reviewed by Brian Welter
Catholic News Service

Miracles have played a rich and vital role throughout Christian history. Divine intervention has assured believers of God’s continued presence and love in human history.

Christine Watkins’ “Full of Grace” and Elizabeth Ficocelli’s “Bleeding Hands, Weeping Stone,” each written by practicing Catholics, present a spiritual view of miraculous events. “Miracle Cures,” written by sociologist Robert A. Scott, politely but resolutely explains such marvels with modern medical and social science. The power of suggestion and the expectations for miracles from deeply religious environments explain these wonders.

“Full of Grace” tells the stories of six people, including the author, who are transformed by Mary, especially through her presence at Medjugorje in what is now Bosnia-Herzegovina. Suicidal drug addicts, social dropouts and broken families are deeply transformed through prayer and halting, sometimes even cynical belief. Just a mustard seed



of prayer and faith moves people to change their lives after God intervenes through Mary.

Watkins never promises that things will be easy, though. The people she portrays keep slipping up. They give up on God, yet God continues to speak, never giving up on them. Their time in Medjugorje is grace-filled, and they find healing, even if they must return more than once. Mary, it turns out, does more healing than all new-fangled therapies ever could because she always leads people to her Son.

“Bleeding Hands, Weeping Stone” is a fun read, as Ficocelli canvasses Christian history for weird, surprising and hard-to-believe supernatural events, including bilocation, luminosity, levitation, the odor of sanctity, incorruption and apparitions.

Until the 19th century, apparitions were not necessarily associated with Mary. In the Middle Ages, many saints, the apostles and even Jesus appeared to people. The devil would also show up, not as his true self, but as a seemingly good spiritual being. Through prayer and keen spiritual sense, a person could spot Satan.

St. Padre Pio, who famously fought with the devil, received many spiritual gifts. He is a modern example of the stigmata, first seen in St. Francis of Assisi. With this blessing, the person shares in some way with the passion of Christ. Such people often have deep connections with Christ’s sufferings. The author shows how such miracles, like all the graces discussed, are Christ-centered. Thus, she notes, “true stigmata are not meant for a specific individual, but for the universal church.”

Such a blessing is not meant to turn that individual into a spiritual celebrity, but to indicate God’s love and presence. A miracle is valid only if it leads people to greater faith and virtue. The Church, and the faith of the people, grow through such heavenly works.

Sociologist Robert A. Scott, author of “Miracle Cures,” takes a much different approach. He acknowledges the reality of miracles in the sense that they are real for the individual and the society from which they come. Miracles play a central role in perpetuating the faith within that society, and the recipient becomes a kind of shaman between this world and the other.

Yet Scott never gets beyond his sociology. Some medical, social or psychological explanation always exists. Causes of miraculous healing include: clean water and air and better nutrition available during a pilgrimage; an improved mental disposition caused by the belief itself; an illness clearing up naturally on its own; or an unconsciously staged illness, by which the person becomes ill so that he or she can then experience a “cure.”

God plays no part in this deeply secular, politely atheistic worldview. Nonetheless, the insights into the power of belief and into the nature of religious societies, both modern and medieval, make “Miracle Cures” a fascinating read. Unlike the atheist fundamentalists of today, Scott does not attempt to argue readers out of their faith. He simply sticks to his story line.

These three books offer answers to the modern-day thirst for spirituality through clear, direct arguments. All three agree that the search for God is a deep part of human nature that has ramifications for all of society.

Rock and Roll for Magglio!

 *A benefit for Magglio Boscarino*

Sunday, July 25, 2010

12:00 - 5:00pm

Leo Ryan Park, Foster City



Please join Magglio, his family, and his friends as we honor his strength and spirit and support his fight against Pompe Disease.

12:00-4:00pm: Enjoy lawn games, Bocce, live music and food
4:00-5:00pm: Drum Circle for Magglio

We look forward to a day of fun, food, bocce, music and love!
For more details and to sign up to attend visit:

<http://rollformagglio.eventbrite.com/>

Sponsorships and in-kind donations are welcome!
Donations are tax-deductible. Tax ID: 32-0250801

Please email sblevin@gmail.com for more information or to donate.

If you are unable to make it but want to donate,
please visit the website above or send a check made out to:
Magglio Boscarino/Roll for Magglio to Stephanie Levin, 187 Coleridge St. #1, SF, CA 94110

\$25 adults
\$10 kids
Includes food

Catholic Bestsellers - July 2010

HARDCOVER

1. Rediscovering Catholicism; Matthew Kelly; Beacon Publishing
2. The Jesuit Guide to (Almost) Everything; James Martin; HarperOne
3. Celebration of Discipline; Richard J. Foster; HarperOne
4. The Seven Levels of Intimacy; Matthew Kelly; Beacon Publishing
5. The Prayers and Personal Devotions of Mother Angelica; Raymond Arroyo; Doubleday Religion
6. Signs of Life; Scott Hahn; Doubleday Religion
7. The Archbishop Wore Combat Boots; Archbishop Philip; Our Sunday Visitor
8. The Lamb’s Supper; Scott Hahn; Doubleday Religion