

# **Crave for Miracles in Contemporary Religion: A Theological Cum Philosophical Consideration**

**Inameti Lawrence Udo**

Department of Philosophy  
Akwa Ibom State University, Obio Akpa Campus  
Akwa Ibom State

## **Abstract**

*This paper is a critical enquiry into the craze for materialism in our contemporary religion. It analysis the general situation contemporary Christians of little faith are being deceived by the so-called miracle workers into mistaking the personality of Jesus with micacles. Consequently, this an unprecedented quest for signs and wonders by desperate contemporary Christians who seek for miracles instead of the God of miracle. In the process they fall prey to these self-acclaimed workers who pupe them claiming to work in the name of the most holy God. There is no gainsayingte fact that most of these miracles are arranged or stage-managed with no biblical basis in a bid to make ends meet. On the part of the numberless adherents this unhealthy quest for miraclis is not unconnected with ignorance, poor economy, poverty, etc. In view of this ugly scenario, this paper focuses primarily on analyzing the miracles of Jesus in comparison to the contemporary trend. It examines both philosophical cum theological claims on the possibility/impossiblity of miracles. However, contrary to the claim by some philosophers in the impossibility of miracles, the paper argues that miracles do happen, but maintains that they should not form the foundation of our faith in God. In conclusion, the paper submits that true Christianity goes beyond miracles to building strong faith in God from where miracles flow.*

**KEY WORDS:** Miracles, Contemporary Religion, Christianity, Faith

## **Introduction:**

Today more than ever, our contemporary religion has been drowned in the ocean of miracles. There is an unprecedented quest for miracles, signs and wonders and the corresponding transmutation of familiar terrains into “miracle centres” with almost numberless adherents. This development has led to people seeking miracles by all means instead of the God of miracle. The situation is so serious that the inability to perform a miracle or to lay claims that one can make a mighty ocean run dry in the religious circle today, may lead some ignorant religious zealots into assuming that such a person is not a real man of God. These “miracle barons”, flag up crusades with very captivating themes here and there such as “Miracle Crusade”, “Miracle Retreat”, “Revival Hour”, “Miracle Time”, “Action Time”, “A New Anointing”, “Power Crusade”, “The Earth must hear the oil” etc. Funny enough in these crusades, those who were never blind received their sights, those who were not deaf hear, those who were not dumb speak, those never paralysed walk upright and so forth. Some Christians of little faith become “religious prostitute” and prey to these religious predators who take advantage of their desperate situations to dupe them in the name of the most holy God. However, the paradox of such miraculous touches is that often times those who receive healing belong to the same sect. Here one begins to wonder: who is fooling who? At this juncture we make bold to say that more often than not most of these miracles are arranged or stage-managed, while the unhealthy drive is not unconnected with the

hardship and poverty among our people, the credibility and profound ignorance in some and the sheer attempt to play God in others.

In this contemporary era, there is great religiosity but little witnessing making the crave for miracle to grow in an alarming proportion, with people forgetting that “God comes to us in the things we know best... the things of our everyday life...” (*Fides et Ratio*, 12). God talks to us in these things especially in the Eucharistic sacrifice, but we seem to be too busy with “big miracles”, where it is happening that we do not hear/listen to Him. In fact, it is axiomatic to say that miracles are closely associated with true holiness and unwavering faith. But it has become the order of the day in recent times that some people who apparently possess psychic or magic powers manipulate people to their own advantage. It is no exaggeration to say that some “miracle-workers” or “healers” are in perfect communion with the occult from where they get their powers to operate. We are in the dangerous days where people are being easily deceived, for which reason extra care must be taken in every step we take in our spiritual journey. Unfortunately enough, because of perpetual political instability, poor economy, ignorance and social disorientation in almost all our nations there is abject poverty and tragic mismanagement. As a result, some of these “miracle workers” take full advantage of the situations and play on people. Often, these self-acclaimed healers whose “...vision is in fact blurred by materialism...” (*Gaudium et Spes* 10) succeed tremendously in winning them over. This is the lot of our people and one of the sad stories of our contemporary religion.

In the face of this ugly trend, the main thrust of this paper is to put into perspective the miracles of Jesus and the reasons behind them in comparison to the contemporary trend. By so doing, we shall look at the philosophical and theological views on the claims of the possibility of miracles and also question why today some Churches are mistaking the person of Jesus with miracles. However, contrary to the claim by some Philosophers the paper agrees that miracles do happen but maintains that they should not form the thrust or foundation of our faith in Jesus Christ. The paper submits that true Christianity goes beyond miracles and is anchored on faith. It therefore calls on all those who are always hungry for miracles to learn to build first strong and deep rooted faith in God. And when this is done, they can be assured of showers of miracles in their lives.

### **What are Miracles?**

The term “miracle” may be defined as an unusual event and experience, or as an extraordinary phenomenon which is beyond the explanatory categories of most current and commonly held scientific theories and cultural perceptions. The *New Dictionary of Theology* defines miracle as “An outstanding event, outstanding because what has occurred is or involves a breach of the usual natural order” (622). Webster’s third international dictionary sees a miracle as “an extraordinary event taken to manifest the supernatural power of God fulfilling his purpose” or “an event or effect in the physical world deviating from the laws of nature”(66). While for Donatus Udoette miracles are “mighty works that have to do with spectacular display of God’s power in history. Most likely they had to do with the overcoming of the powers of the evil one through the saving power of God” (45). The above definitions imply that a miracle has to do with a divine intervention in the laws of nature. It therefore means that without the supernatural (God), certainly there will be no miracle. It was on this note that Caesarius of Heisterbach described miracle as anything contrary to the course of nature at which we marvel; something ultimately performed by God but proximately through saints, healers or by evil spirits. According to him, they are signs of God’s intervention in a particular moment in the history of

salvation. Corroborating the above view, Monden called miracle “a reminder of God’s constant activity at man’s world” (15). In the mind of Dorner miracles are:

Sensuously cognizable events, not comprehensible on the ground of the causality of nature as such, but essentially on the ground of God’s free action alone. Such facts find their possibility in the constitution of nature and God’s living relation to it, their necessity in the aim of revelation which they subserve” (*The Encyclopedia Britannica*, 571).

Hence, the falling down of manna from heaven, the falling of quails, the parting of the red sea, the raising of the dead, the healing of the sick, the calming of the sea and so on are all examples of God using His power to momentarily override the natural system He has put in place”(Shalom, 24). This might have informed Catholic theologians’ comment that a miracle which is an act involving direct control over the laws of nature necessarily requires the exercise of divine powers and that if a created being should work a miracle, this can only be through intervention of God. Their argument arises from the fact that only the power that established these laws can alter them either directly or through the instrumentality of other agents. From the above expose, it is evident that true miracles do not occur without the intervention of God, hence no man should boast for having worked a miracle.

### **Miracles are as old as Creation**

The archaeologists tell us that miracles are as old as creation itself. Before creation began, the earth was a formless void, there was darkness over the deep and the spirit of the Lord was hovering over the waters (Gen.1:1-2). Then God began His work of creation. But from whence did He come? This is miraculous! The theologians tell us and rightly too that God existed from the beginning. But when did the beginning begin? This too is miraculous! The very story of creation as we read in Genesis is shrouded in mystery. The concept of creation “*Ex Nihilo*” has no scientific explanation and as such is miraculous. God simply said: “let there be this” and there was. The earth was thus transformed from the formless void of nothingness into a divinely designed habitable paradise. Within six days all forms of life came into existence at God’s command in ascending order of dignity with man- God’s image (*Imago Dei*) and creation’s king coming last. With a scenario typical of the polytheistic myths of the ancient Near East, the narrative conveys a revelation of the one, transcendent God existing before the world which He created-a revelation valid for all times and ages. As the Lord of creation, all things created miraculously yielded to the exigencies of His divine will. In creating the world He gave it the properties and forces it now has. When these are suspended under certain circumstances, we say a miracle has occurred.

### **Christianity and Miracles**

From what we have hitherto discussed, there is no gain saying that the very fabric and edifice of Christianity is built on miracle. The Christian religion has ever professed itself to be a religion of miracle. Early documents assure us that a series of miracles ushered in the life of its founder. For instance, the incarnation of Christ, the Eucharist and even the death and resurrection of Christ which is for all times and ages an irresistible attestation of the truth of his divinity. These are instances where God suspended the normal course of things to bring about change in the “spatio-temporal” order. Christianity as a religion supposes that God has superseded the

natural order on man's behalf. The miracles of Jesus which bear testimony of His divinity are not only unprecedented in the history of man but also unrivalled even to this day. His miracles were usually inspired by either the faith of the person (cf. Mk.10:52; Mtt.9:27-30; Lk.5:19) or out of pity (Mk.8:1-8). It is equally clear that some difficult cases were taken to Him whom He favoured (Lk.5:40; Mk.7:32). But in all these we are yet to understand that He ever canvassed for the problem stricken for miracle's sake. Jesus called His miracles "works" (Jn.14:12), and would not perform them for unbelievers (Mtt.13:58) neither would He perform them for any material gain except for the glorification of God's name. Again, Jesus' works (miracles) were always done within the proclamation of the gospel. If He ever performed before preaching, it was an opposite charity- to supply a dire need and that was before His "hour". Yet He would not do it without His mother first preaching to His disciples: "Do whatever He tells you", and only those that heard the preaching benefited by way of increase of faith (cf. Jn.2:1-11). Furthermore, when the seventy two disciples proclaimed the kingdom and were highly thrilled by the submission of the devil to them, Jesus didactically corrected them and though He had seen the devil fall like lightening from heaven, told them to rejoice rather for the work well done which saw their names written in heaven (cf. Lk.10:17-20). These demonstrate that FAITH is the pre requisite for any concrete miracle to take place because it attracts God's intervention in our lives. Often in the scriptures whenever Christ wanted to or was invited to intervene in the plight of anyone, He demanded faith and it was with this foundation that He wrought His miracles. In Nazareth for instance, Christ could not work further miracles there because of the lack of faith of His people (cf. Mtt.13:53-58). Suffice it at this juncture to say that those who are mature in faith do not clamour for miracles. Such clamour is a betrayal of true Christianity. It is an indicative of spiritual weakness, spiritual emptiness, spiritual poverty and spiritual aridity. Faith like that of the mustard seed (cf. Mtt.7:14-20) can guarantee your miracle. Anything other than this would amount to putting the cart before the horse. Let us call to mind the cases of the woman with the flow of blood (Mtt.9:20-22), that of the Cannanite woman (Mtt.15:21-28), and that of the paralytic man (Mtt.9:1-8) to mention but a few. In all these, their faith moved Christ to action and they were made whole. Miracles are not an irrelevant gospel; it only requires adequate catechizing and perhaps not more emphasis than the good news of faith and practice. Assent of faith is anterior to miracles. Calling a person to receive miracles without faith enslaves him as he will look for the same 'miracle worker' again sooner or later with the intention always of just getting a miracle. What is paramount is giving him faith through proper teaching and catechizing which would make him fit to receive miracles on his own. This is summarized in the Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC) thus, "to teach in order to lead others to faith is the task of every preacher and each believer" (904). Our people need to know that God is not a problem dump to be sought only for miracles. They need to know about salvation unto life in Christ which should be everyone's target. Surely that voice still echoes today: "my people perished for want of knowledge" (Hos.4:6). Miracles are not a sine-qua non for authentic Christian spirituality and evangelization. They only add to or strengthen the faith of the people but not in all cases. The main thing is preaching the word of God and administration of the sacraments which are divine treasures given to the Church by God. These are avenues through which blessings and miracles abound if approached with deep faith and devotion. Faith is like a magnet that can pull God easily to a Christian. That is why the scripture says: "if you have faith, you will say to this mountain be pulled up and be planted in the sea; it will happen" (Mk.11:22-23).

The situation in our society today where we hear over the radio or television: "come and receive your miracle(s) in this or that Church: the blind shall see, the barren shall conceive, the

lame will walk” is not ideal because Christ never did that. He even abhorred His name being mentioned whenever and wherever He wrought a miracle. In describing Jesus, Peter says: “He went about doing good and curing all who had fallen under power of the devil” (Acts 10:38). The point to note here is that after healing people Jesus often commanded them not to speak about their cures. Since Christ was against publicising and advertisement of miracles, it stands to reason that today’s miracle adverts is grossly in error. Many today abuse the media at their disposal and say whatever they want to say and write. The ulterior motive behind this is but financial/commercial oriented. This has also led to current proliferation of Churches which have been established for purely economic reasons. Many Nigerians because of so much poverty in the land have come to see religion as a business aimed at making money and getting rich quickly. Attendant upon this development is the wide range of deceits and falsehood in the name of miracles. The turning of religion into business in Nigeria is well articulated by Obiora when he stated that:

In recent times, Churches’ proliferation has been the fine, great fulcrum for...quantum leap from the backwaters of poverty to the enviable high grounds of affluent society. It has become the lubricant, the energizer, the accelerator and the ‘inspirator’ of our newfound market system (21-39).

All we are saying is that it cannot be from God those miracle workers who perform and found Churches with the sole aim of making money or profit. Miracles should not serve as a bait to draw people to God as is the case today. There is no doubt therefore that the devil has inspired many to perform wonders with the intention of leading men of little faith astray. The faith of a believer must not be hinged on signs and wonders. Besides, miracles do not show the level of sanctity or the authenticity and ‘genuineness’ of a religious sect. Jesus even seems to assume that extraordinary actions will be performed by ordinary or evil men: Let’s hear Him:

When that day comes many will say to me, Lord did we not prophesy in your name, cast out demons in your name, and work many miracles in your name? Then I shall tell them to their faces: I have never known you away from me, you evil men” (cf.Mtt.7:22,23).

Miracles therefore are no litmus test for credibility or holiness and should not form the foundation of our faith in Jesus Christ.

### **Philosophy and Miracles**

There are pro-arguments on the possibility of miracles and these come mostly from theologians and the fathers of the Church like St. Thomas Aquinas, St. Augustine et cetera. Aquinas for instance, does not only agree to the possibility of miracles but sees them as those things done by divine agency beyond the order commonly observed in nature. In Philosophy, there abound arguments advanced against the possibility of miracles. Baruch Spinoza, one of the rationalists Philosopher considers claims to miracles as violation of the order of nature and such violation according to him is tantamount to divine self-contradiction. The argument is that God is not such as to interfere with the world having once set it on its orderly course. In a similar note, David Hume; an Empiricists Philosopher declared the “absolute impossibility of miracle” which is derived from the fact that it involves the violation of the well established laws of nature. Thus,

miracles are apriori impossible and no human testimony can have such a force as to prove a miracle. The laws of nature are well established and inviolable. Any claims that imply the violation of these laws should apriori be rejected as the product of delusion. Furthermore, Hume argued that claims of miracles are generally made among “ignorant and barbarious nations” as a result of lack of education. These uneducated fellows involve in religious activities to exploit the poor and ignorant worshippers in a bid to promote the course of their religious beliefs (Etuk 32).

Having said the foregoing, we want to as a matter of critical analysis submit that when considered as occurrences brought about by a divine intervention; “the concept of miracle passes from the empirical realm to the realm of faith; the truth of which defies any empirical analysis” (32). To call an occurrence a miracle therefore means to express a belief or to make an act of faith. But even when understood in this sense, miracles remain at least a logical possibility just as the existence of God remains a logical possibility. The existence of God cannot be conclusively shown to be apriori impossible. Likewise the occurrence of miracles understood as an act of divine intervention in human affairs. This means that Hume’s position on the apriori impossibility of miracles cannot be conclusively established. Miracles do happen but all attempts to perfidiously employ such claims for ulterior motives and commercial evangelism must be jettisoned.

### **Characteristics of Authentic Miracles**

It is a thing of common knowledge that ours is a society where people seek for miracles instead of the God of miracles. People go to Churches, attend tarry nights and crusades only in search of miracles. They do not go to encounter God as the source and origin of their being. There are going there in search for miracles devoid of genuine worship. Miracle is therefore worshipped and glorified. From its Greek root, miracle is far from this; it is not merely a wonder (*Teras*), but a sign pointing to the Divine (*Semeion*). This distinguishes it from mere marvels and gives it a moral import of its own. Thus, every true miracle ought to manifest God’s omnipotence, His mercy and kindness. It must set forth God’s glory. In addition, it is a characteristic of an authentic miracle of Christ to always ask for belief or faith of recipients. Christ cured the centurion’s servant (Lk.7:1-10), the paralytic (Lk.5:17-26), the thankful leper (Lk.17:11-19), because He noticed the amount of faith they had. To raise the daughter of Jairus (Lk.8:40-41,51-55), to cure the boy possessed by a demon (Mtt.17:14-21), He always ask for belief. For the woman suffering from haemorrhage (Lk.8:43-48) and the blind man of Jericho (Mt.20:29-34), He affirmed the amount of faith in them. The evangelists all agreed that faith is characteristic and preliminary for miracle. Authentic miracles are not imposed nor compelled but have to be acknowledged and welcomed with a personal decision that is anchored on faith. Any miracle that does not point to God as the key and does not have faith as a preliminary condition should not be accepted. Another point worthy of note is that authentic miracle is received through the gift of the Holy Spirit working in a true Christian. It is also got through the intercessory prayers of Christians. Whether cures or miracles come instantly or over a period of time, always trust that God is faithful. His power is enough to take away your infirmities and bear your diseases. Many have experienced this as a reality and you too can do the same. It is very much discouraging to seek for any kind of wonder through occult means. Such crave puts the inquirer into a diabolical contact with the evil spirits instead of the true spirit of God. While some physical relief might be obtained on occasion, the psychological distress that comes with it makes it a very bad pursuit. We condemn the recent crave for miracles as an unhealthy attitude as it is an indicative of complete lack of faith. You do not need to go to places before you receive

a package from God. If God wants to work a miracle for you, or intervene in your situation time and place do not count or matter. Whether you are in a hole or not God can still reach you if He wants to. This is the same thing that the psalmist was re-echoing: “if I climb the heavens you are there...” (cf. Ps.139:8-12). Jonah had the same experience. So one should not rush for miracles as one may be deceived, rather one should live a life of faith in God knowing that with Him all things are possible.

### **Concluding Remarks**

Let us conclude this paper with a story told by late Rev.Fr.Dr. Nicholas Obi, a one time rector of St. Joseph Major Seminary, Ikot Ekpene, Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria. Perhaps it would help us understand and appreciate the content of this piece. The story is about a certain miracle-working preacher from afar who stormed Uyo (in Akwa Ibom State) sometime. It is said that after he had preached with the spirit and power of an Elijah in one of his outings during those three days, he paused and asked all those who had experienced healing to step up the stage and testify. And in full view of the multitude present and thousands of others watching these great happenings from their homes on their T.V sets, those who claimed of having experienced instant healing began to surge forward. Now, among these were parents of a youngster whose name was given as Sunday Ebong. The preacher made him say the word, “Alleluia”! And he repeated same after him with an amazing ease. Wild went the mob. The parents then testified that the eight (8) years old son (a student of St. Louise School for the deaf and dumb located at Ikot Ekpene) who was born deaf and dumb had experienced instant healing. The fact is, and this is the crux of the matter, the Daughters of Charity, who run this school, complained to him that this young boy whom they were shocked to see on the screen in their uniform was thoroughly unknown to them! You cannot beat that, can you?

This is exactly what we are talking about. The recent craze for miracles and the criminal attempt at exploiting the African need has made fraudsters to open miracle centres for selfish interest with all forms of manipulation. What a world? The tendency today whereby we sing “He is alive, Amen” when we see a purported miracle or we have experienced one is not true Christianity. True Christianity goes beyond miracle to having a strong faith in God irrespective of the situation and circumstance. Here we call to mind the experience of Job as recorded in the scripture. Upon all he went through, he remained a true Christian with strong faith in God. This indeed is a lesson for humanity. “If miracles are to be accepted, they must be accepted as part of our Christian belief and cannot be made the ground for it” (Joyce 66). Jesus chides those who only follow Him because of what they will get. He rather loves those who worship God in truth even when they are yet to see miracles.

Our lives today are miracles. Why stretch further to see and look for another. Until we begin to worship God in spirit and in truth and stop running after miracles; we will still give more jobs to our many pseudo prophets of today. As for me, I believe in every day miracles- the wonder of my being, the presence of God in the Eucharist, the order in creation, the laughter of a child, the sunrise and sunset, the rose flower, the rainbow, the movement of a millipede et cetera. Miracles are necessary and good especially at the elementary stage of faith formation. But caution needs to be exercised because of its attendant dangers. If miracles do not yield fruits of deeper faith, conversion, greater belief in God, and of course well defined and interiorised Christian life, they become sterile. Let us now go beyond miracles to a more sincere and unconditional worship of God. Let us seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness; for it is by so doing that we can be sure of harvest of miracles.

## Works Cited

- Holy Bible*: The Revised Standard Version (RSV) Print.
- John Paul 11, *Faith and Reason*. Lagos: Paulines publications, 1998. Print.
- Joyce, George H., *The Question of Miracles*. London: The Manresa Press, 1914. Print.
- Komonchak, Joseph A., *The New Dictionary of Theology*. Bangalore: Theological Publications, 1987. Print.
- MacNuth, Francis. *The Power to Heal*. Indiana: Ave Maria Press, 1972. print.
- Monden, Louis. *Signs and Wonders: A Study of the Miraculous Element in Religion*. New York: Desclee co, 1966. Print.
- Obiora, Fidelis K., 1999 *The Divine Deceit: Business in Religion*. Enugu: Optimal Publications.
- The Catechism of the Catholic Church*. Ibadan: Paulines Publications, 2008. Print.
- Udoette, Donatus (2004) *Charism and the Church*. Enugu: Snaap Press
- Vatican Council 11 (1975) *Gaudium et Spes*. Flannery A. Ed. Vol. 1. Dublin: Dominican Publications.