



A LOCUST OF FAKE MIRACLES IN AFRICAN CHURCHES: A NEED FOR REORIENTATION ON THE AFRICAN VALUE OF TRUTH

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Abstract

One of the greatest cankerworms of Christianity in contemporary Nigeria is the maddening quest for miracles and prophecies. This has constricted the criteria of what constitutes a true man of God, or a minister, to one who can perform miracles and give prophecies. It has equally led to a situation where some men of God stage manage miracles and prophecies to meet their faithful popular demand of miracles and prophecies. The mind-boggling paradoxes in this scenario are how fake miracles have become a norm in a religion whose founder, Jesus Christ, is regarded as the “Way and the truth”, and how a people who are of a cultural background where honesty is a core value system willfully engage in the business of spiritually manipulating and hoodwinking unsuspecting individuals. This informs the research questions of the paper, which are: What is a miracle? What makes a miracle fake? What is the possible leeway out of the present conundrum of fake miracles? It is in light of this that the paper, through a critical and explorative method, examines the present locust of fake miracles in Nigerian Christian churches and the African notion of truth, with a particular focus on the Igbo of southeastern Nigeria. The study establishes that to curb the present surge of fake miracles by supposed ministers of the gospel, there is a need for reorienting the ministers on the African value of honesty. To do this, the study relies overwhelmingly on secondary sources such as books, online journals, newspapers, and internet.

Keywords: Fake Miracles/Prophecies, Value System, African notion of truth, Religion.

Introduction

One of the plausible pieces of evidence for the proliferation of churches in the contemporary Nigerian society and Africa at large is the quest for miracles. Every day, a new church springs up by the roadside, and before you know it, people are flocking to it. The primary bait that these new churches effectively leverage is the promise that the signs and wonders that take place in their church are leaps and bounds beyond those of other churches. With the advent of social media platforms, where these said miracles are easily publicized to gain a wider reach, it becomes very easy to gain new gullible followers to believe their lies.

The country's poor economic trajectory, which continues to widen socio-economic gaps, makes many Nigerians, particularly the poor to rely on miracles for the basic things that the government should provide. Hence, things like getting visas, travelling to other countries, getting a job, among others, have become glorified as miracles, which many ardently seek. This births a locust of fake miracles. A situation where unscrupulous men of God tap into the vulnerability and ignorance of the people through false claims of miracles that

never happened. Fully aware of the faithful's lack, these men of God stage manage miracles, that is, they arrange miracles such as financial breakthroughs, healing of the blind, raising of the dead, selling different oils and handkerchiefs, among others, as a way of curating their supposed powers and inducing the people's mind to trust their capability to solve their problems. A typical example of this scenario was an event that occurred ten years ago in Pretoria, South Africa, when Members of Prophet Penuel's End Times Disciples Ministries in Soshanguve ate parts of a snake, believing it would become chocolate (Resane, 2017). One begins to imagine the level of manipulation that could push one to do this. Also, some of these pulpit commercialists give false prophecies as a kind of psychological tool to control the minds of the faithful. This is seen in instances where people are told that their family or their uncle is the source of their problem. This is just one out of the numerous antics used to capture the minds of the faithful who are hungry for miracles.

At the core of this, falsehood and faking of miracles are deceit and lies. A situation of “the more you look, the less you see”. Now, the fact that one of the core values in the African system is truth-telling (honesty), particularly the Igbo people of

southeastern Nigeria, who has the saying “Eziokwu bun du” - Truth is life”, makes the situation funnily ironic. The irony lies in the fact that these men of God, who share in this value system given their African cultural heritage, are soaked in deceit and poised to deceive their followers for their selfish gains. More pathetic is the fact that these men of God are the heads of a religion whose founder is believed to be “The Way and the Truth”(John 4:6).

This informs the research questions of the paper, which are: What is a miracle? What makes a miracle fake? What is the possible leeway out of the present conundrum of fake miracles? It is in light of this that the paper, through a critical and explorative method, examines the present locust of fake miracles in Nigerian Christian churches and the notion of truth in the African Value system, with a particular focus on the Igbo of southeastern Nigeria. The study is divided into four sections: The first conceptualizes the concept of miracle and fake miracles. The second section explores the quest for fake miracles and the many instances of fake miracles in contemporary Nigerian society. The third section digs into the notion of truth in the African Value system, with a focus on the Igbo of Southeastern Nigeria. The final section recommends and justifies the need for a reorientation of the African cultural value of honesty to curb the present surge of fake miracles by the gospel ministers. The study is significant in that it establishes that a reorientation of the ministers on the African value of honesty could serve as a panacea to the present surge of fake miracles. To do this, the study relies overwhelmingly on secondary sources such as books, online journals, newspapers, and internet.

Conceptualization of Miracles and Fake Miracles

A miracle is generally understood as an extraordinary event occurring within the physical realm that appears to transcend all known human capacities or natural laws, and which defies scientific or rational explanation (Iwuagwu, 2018). The etymological root of the term “miracle” lies in the Latin word *miraculum*, which denotes “a marvel” (Cotter, 2009, p. 99). Iwuagwu (2018) provides a more detailed philological analysis, tracing the term further to *miraculum*, *mirari*, and *mirus*. *Miraculum* connotes an object of wonder; *mirari* means “to marvel” or “to be astonished”; and *mirus* conveys the idea of something “wonderful,” “astonishing,” or “amazing” (p. 64). These root words collectively suggest that a miracle refers to any occurrence or phenomenon that evokes awe and amazement.

From a biblical perspective, Powell (1989) defines a miracle as “an extraordinary event that constitutes an inexplicable manifestation of God’s power” (p. 638). Complementing this, Iroegbu (2005) characterizes a miracle as “an extraordinary event ... produced by God in a religious context as a sign of the supernatural” (p. 8). Iwuagwu (2018) extends this theological interpretation through a nuanced hermeneutical approach by examining the terminologies used in the New Testament. He identifies four Greek terms associated with miracles: *Semeion* (sign), *Terata* (wonder or portent),

Dunameis (mighty works), and *Erga* (deeds or works). These terms emphasize the divine and revelatory nature of miracles, particularly in relation to the identity and mission of Jesus Christ.

However, Iwuagwu also notes a significant linguistic divergence between the original Greek terms and their Latin counterparts—*miraculum*, *mirari*, and *mirus*. While the Greek terms underscore the theological and messianic significance of Jesus’ works, the Latin renderings focus primarily on the marvel or astonishment these acts evoke. It is this Latin emphasis on the extraordinary that forms the basis of the modern English understanding of “miracle,” highlighting its association with the marvelous, astonishing, and inexplicable (Iwuagwu, 2018, p. 66).

Conceptually, miracles may be categorized in two broad senses: the exclusive (or strict) sense and the inclusive sense. In its exclusive or strict interpretation, a miracle is perceived as a direct, supernatural intervention by a divine being that overrides or suspends the natural order. Such an event is entirely inexplicable by known scientific or natural laws. Consequently, if an occurrence can be rationalized within existing natural or scientific frameworks, it does not qualify as a miracle in this stricter sense, regardless of how astonishing it may seem (Iwuagwu, 2018). Examples of miracles understood in this exclusive sense include the Virgin conception and birth of Jesus Christ, His resurrection, the healing of a blind man through spoken words, the feeding of five thousand people with five loaves and a few fish, and the instantaneous recovery of a terminally ill individual through prayer alone. These phenomena represent departures from natural laws and typically evoke skepticism, particularly among critical or scientific observers, due to their inherently supernatural character (Iwuagwu, 2018).

In a broader, more inclusive or informal context, the term *miracle* is frequently employed to describe any extraordinary or highly favorable event, even when such events are neither scientifically inexplicable nor contrary to the laws of nature. In this expanded usage, a miracle may refer to events such as surviving a fatal automobile accident, escaping unharmed from a fire, recovering from a severe illness, or succeeding in a particularly difficult examination where most others have failed. Although these occurrences are not beyond natural explanation, they are often perceived as acts of divine intervention or favor. Thus, within this informal or extensive framework, miracles encompass a wide range of perceived blessings or beneficial outcomes attributed to God’s providence, even when they conform to the natural order. Iwuagwu (2018) encapsulates this broader understanding of miracles by referencing Thomas Aquinas, who articulated both the exclusive and inclusive dimensions of miraculous phenomena. Aquinas proposed a three-tiered classification or gradation of miracles, each deriving from the same divine source, God. According to Aquinas:

“The highest degree in miracles comprises those works wherein something is done by God, that nature can never do; for instance, that two bodies occupy the same place, that the

sun recede or stand still, that the sea be divided and make way to the passerby....The second degree in miracles belongs to those whereby God does something that nature can do, but not in the same order, thus it is a work of nature that animal live, see and work but that an animal live after being dead, see after being blind, walk after being lame, this nature cannot do, but God does these things sometimes by a miracle....The third degree of miracles is when God does what is wont to be done by the operation of nature, but without the operation of the natural principles: for instance when by the power of God a man is cured of a fever that nature can cure; or when it rains without the operation of the principles of nature.” (Summa Contra Gentiles 111, 101&Summa Theologiae I Q.105, Art.8, cited in Iwuagwu, p.65).

In this study, the concept of miracle is approached from both the exclusive and inclusive perspectives. It is important to underscore that, due to the inherently supernatural nature of a miracle; its occurrence is beyond the control of any human agent. A miracle, by definition, is an act of divine intervention, and thus, only God can effect it. Human beings may become instruments through which miracles occur, but they do not possess the capacity to generate or guarantee miraculous outcomes independently. This recognition calls into question the legitimacy of religious ministers who claim the ability to perform miracles at will, as if they wield authority over the divine, commanding God to act according to their personal volition. Within this context, it becomes essential to delineate and conceptualize what is meant by the term *fake miracle*.

Conceptualization of Fake Miracles

A miracle may be classified as *fake* when it purports to demonstrate supernatural intervention in human affairs, yet lacks any genuine trace of the divine or supernatural. A fake miracle constitutes a deliberate performance—a carefully orchestrated spectacle designed to imitate the presence of divine agency where none exists. Such false manifestations are typically arranged by human agents with the intent of deceiving an audience into believing that a miraculous event has taken place. For example, when an individual who is not blind is presented as blind in a religious gathering, only to be “healed” during a staged event to bolster belief in the spiritual prowess of a minister or the legitimacy of a religious institution, the so-called miracle is demonstrably fake. It neither possesses any supernatural essence nor adheres to moral standards, as it is fundamentally rooted in manipulation, deception, and falsehood.

A number of scholars—among them Thomas Aquinas, H.D. Lewis, C.S. Hefling, A.H. Larmer, and W. Jackson (as cited in Iwuagwu, 2018)—concur that for an event to qualify as a miracle in the strict or exclusive sense, two essential criteria must be fulfilled. First, the event must transcend all known natural laws; second, it must originate solely from divine agency—that is, it must be attributable not to any natural cause, but exclusively to a supernatural source, namely God. With regard to the first criterion, Iwuagwu (2018) references H.D. Lewis, who asserts that:

A miracle must involve, as one condition, a total break in the normal or natural continuity of events. It would, in that case, defy all normal explanation. It would not happen in accordance with any law or regularity in the course of things. It would supersede or suspend such laws. That above all, is what makes it a miracle” (p.65).

Consequently, any event whose occurrence can be adequately explained through recourse to established natural or scientific laws cannot be classified as a miracle. A miracle, in the strict and exclusive sense, must defy human comprehension within the framework of natural causality. Furthermore, another essential criterion for the validation of a miracle is that its occurrence must lie beyond the capacity of all created beings. In other words, the manifestation of a miracle necessitates divine intervention or, at the very least, the involvement of a supernatural agency—whether directly by God or indirectly through intermediaries such as angels, saints, or select human agents (Iwuagwu, 2018). Building upon this conceptual foundation that delineates the boundaries between genuine miracles and natural occurrences, or fabricated claims thereof, the study now transitions to the second major section: an in-depth examination of the proliferation of fake miracles within contemporary Nigerian Christian religious contexts.

A locust of fake miracles in Nigerian Contemporary churches: An exploration.

The increasing obsession with miracles among Nigerian Christians has, in recent times, evolved into a significant social concern, as numerous individuals have become victims of deceptive miracle practitioners (Ademiluka, 2023). In support of this view, Iwuagwu (2018) observes that:

It is common place in Nigeria today to be overwhelmed in public places by the sight of billboards, banners, posters, and fliers publishing crusades, programs, and churches where miracles take place. The social, print, and electronic media are not left out as a potent medium in this advertisement for miracles. Many television channels are devoted to the promise and display of ... miracles. (p. 68)

Antwi (2016) attributes the unrestrained pursuit of miracles among Nigerian Christians to the rise of charismatic movements, which placed considerable emphasis on the healing and exorcism ministries of Jesus. This trend initially emerged within the Aladura Pentecostal movement, which gained prominence during the global influenza pandemic of 1918, responding primarily with prayer and the use of consecrated water as spiritual remedies (Fagunwa 2020; Alana 1994; Omotoye 1996–1999; cited in Ademiluka, 2023). However, the contemporary surge in the quest for miracles is more accurately situated within the framework of neo-Pentecostalism, characterized by its doctrinal emphasis on prosperity and miraculous interventions (Ademiluka, 2023). The prosperity gospel, central to this orientation, can be traced to the three major theological shifts that shaped twentieth-century American Christianity (Kitause, 2015, cited in Ademiluka, 2023): namely, the Pentecostal movement marked by glossolalia, initiated by Charles Fox Parham (1873–1929) and advanced by William Joseph Seymour (1870–1922); the

faith-prosperity movement championed by Essek William Kenyon (1867–1948); and the signs and wonders movement spearheaded by Peter Wagner and John Wimber (Kitaue 2015; Hunt 2000; cited in Ademiluka, 2023). The prosperity gospel made its entrance into Nigeria in the mid-1980s (Kitaue, 2015, cited in Ademiluka, 2023) and has since placed strong emphasis on material wealth and supernatural breakthroughs. In this context, miracle-working became a defining hallmark of Pentecostal Christianity, setting it apart from other Christian traditions (Ukah, 2011, p. 48).

Iheanacho (2009) notes that within Pentecostal Charismatic circles, every minister is either a visionary or a purported miracle worker, or at the very least, presents themselves as one (p.107). This emphasis on miracles within Pentecostalism is likely rooted in their holistic view of illness, which encompasses not only physical ailments but also spiritual, psychological, socio-economic, and political conditions (Kalu, 2008). While conventional medicine may address physical illnesses, the other dimensions of suffering are believed to necessitate divine intervention. Pastor Enoch Adeboye, General Overseer of the Redeemed Christian Church of God (RCCG), teaches that illness is a manifestation of the devil's influence, and a true Christian cannot harbor both sickness and the Holy Spirit within their body. In his view, sickness demands a divine remedy (Adeboye, 1994, cited in Ademiluka, 2023). As Endong (2015, p.19) observes, this belief system makes it nearly inevitable that the practice of Christianity in such contexts is intrinsically linked to the performance of miracles.

Given this theological framework, it is unsurprising that the belief in miracles occupies a central role in the teachings of neo-Pentecostal pastors. For these pastors, "signs and wonders legitimize" their authority as divinely appointed messengers (Endong, 2015, p.19). For example, Femi Emmanuel, founder of Living spring Chapel, asserts that "Miracle is the crux of the gospel. Gospel minus miracles becomes ridiculous. Christianity is the religion of signs and wonders" (Ukah, 2011, p.49). Similarly, Pastor Chris Oyakhilome of Christ Embassy contends that miracles serve as the preacher's credentials. According to him, if a preacher proclaims the message of Jesus Christ and is truly sent by Him, God will confirm this with miracles. If miracles do not accompany their ministry, the preacher must question whether they have genuinely been called (Ukah, 2011).

Miracles are frequently marketed through the names of churches, with the word 'miracle' or terms associated with miracles prominently featured. Notable examples include Mountain of Fire and Miracles Ministries, Salvation and Healing Power International, Rhema Deliverance Mission, Freedom and Deliverance Ministries, and Jesus Victorious Miracles Ministry, among others (Ademiluka, 2007; Ademiluka, 2023). These ministries advertise miracles as a solution for a wide range of human concerns, including deliverance from not only physical and spiritual ailments but also challenges such as unemployment and, notably, poverty (Iwuagwu, 2018). Asamoah-Gyadu (2005, cited in Ademiluka, 2023) contends that this intense demand for

miracles from the faithful creates pressure on religious leaders to perform miracles by any means. However, Iwuagwu (2018) challenges this notion, arguing that it is the advertisement of miracles that drives individuals to seek them out. Consequently, it is in response to such advertisements that large crowds gather at designated locations, expecting miracles even for situations that could be resolved through ordinary efforts, without the need for supernatural intervention (Iwuagwu, 2018).

A panoramic view of instances of fake miracles in Nigeria and Africa.

In Nigeria, the proliferation of miracle claims, particularly among Pentecostal preachers, is widespread. These claims include miraculous events such as causing the barren to conceive, healing various diseases, including terminal conditions like HIV/AIDS, and even raising the dead (Ademiluka, 2007, in Ademiluka, 2018). Crusade grounds serve as the primary venues for these miracles, with many churches holding regular crusades for evangelistic purposes. However, among Pentecostals, miracles often take center stage in such programs. While smaller church crusades may not receive extensive media coverage, the larger events are often broadcast on television, where the airing of miracles takes precedence (Obayi&Edogor, 2016). In fact, several prominent Pentecostal pastors own satellite television channels dedicated to religious programming, particularly showcasing miracles. Notable examples include Chris Oyakhilome of Christ Embassy and the late T. B. Joshua of the Synagogue Church of All Nations. Oyakhilome began his television ministry in 1996, launching the program *Atmosphere for Miracles (ATM)*, which aired daily on over twenty television stations until the Nigerian Broadcasting Corporation (NBC) imposed a ban on miracle demonstrations in 2004. Similarly, T. B. Joshua's Emmanuel Television became renowned for broadcasting healing miracles.

Despite the large gatherings at miracle centers and numerous televised claims of miraculous events, such miracles have attracted significant criticism. One of the main critiques is the disproportionate emphasis on miracles rather than evangelism (Ademiluka, 2018). Asaju (1987, in Ademiluka, 2018) argues that this emphasis substitutes signs and wonders for the salvation of souls, which should be the primary mission of Jesus. Many Nigerians express skepticism regarding the authenticity of most televised miracles, a doubt stemming from several factors. First, the sheer volume of miracle claims raises questions about their credibility. Iwuagwu (2018) observes that "frivolous miracle claims have raised more questions than answers," leading worshippers to become increasingly reluctant to accept anything as genuine, given the widespread understanding that some miracles are fabricated or staged to deceive unsuspecting followers. Instances of such fake miracles are numerous.

In 2016, the police in Enugu State apprehended a notorious syndicate allegedly involved in colluding with pastors to stage fake miracles (Iwuagwu, 2018). In this scheme, a so-called 'miracle-working pastor' hires individuals to feign certain

health issues. After obtaining the details of these individuals, the pastor publicly prophesies about their conditions, prays for them, and then the individuals testify to having been miraculously healed (Iwuagwu, 2018, p. 69). A similar case was reported on 14 March 2020 by *The Punch*, which aired a video clip of a pastor performing what seemed to be a miraculous healing on a woman. However, a second video clip surfaced showing the same woman, claiming to have the same health problem when another pastor prayed for her (Folarin, 2020).

On 13 January 2024, the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) African Eye published a documentary by Charlie Northcott, Helen Spooner, and Tamasin Ford, exposing how the late renowned televangelist T. B. Joshua of the Synagogue Church of All Nations faked miracles that attracted millions of worshippers. The BBC's investigation, which included testimonies from over 25 church insiders from the UK, Nigeria, Ghana, the US, South Africa, and Germany, identified six methods Joshua used to deceive worshippers: emergency departments, drugs, brainwashing, bribes, fake medical certificates, and video manipulation. The emergency department within the church was an exclusive section responsible for making the miracles appear authentic. Here, individuals seeking healing would undergo screening, and the team would determine who should be filmed and prayed for by Joshua. Paul Agomoh, one of T. B. Joshua's senior disciples, who supervised the department for a decade under Joshua's direct instructions, told the BBC that the team was "trained by medical doctors." According to Agomoh, patients with cancer were dismissed, while those with treatable conditions, such as open wounds, were brought in and presented as having serious illnesses like cancer. This staged process created the illusion of miraculous healing (BBC Africa Eye, 2024).

Paul further revealed that every foreign visitor who came to the Synagogue Church for healing was required to fill out a medical report detailing their illness and current medications. They were instructed to discontinue their medication, but Joshua would secretly arrange for pharmacists to procure the same medications, which would then be mixed into the visitors' fruit drinks. They were encouraged to consume this cocktail, which had been "blessed" by Joshua. This manipulation ensured that visitors remained healthy during their stay at the church, thereby reinforcing their belief in the divine healing powers of their pastor. The televised "healing miracles," broadcast regularly to millions, often included medical reports claiming that individuals had been cured of severe diseases such as HIV/AIDS and cancer, with doctors on camera validating these supposed cures.

In 2000, Nigerian journalist Adejuwon Soyinka uncovered that these medical certificates were fabricated, but Joshua suppressed his investigation, causing it to go nowhere. Despite this, some individuals continue to believe they were healed, although insiders insist that these events were mere performances orchestrated by the late preacher (BBC Africa Eye, 2024). Paul, who described Joshua as an "evil genius," stated, "The whole thing is stage-managed and faked. It's

faked... T.B. Joshua was the one who masterminded the whole manipulation." He further emphasized that nothing that occurred on the church premises was beyond Joshua's knowledge. Bisola, the Chief Video Editor of the church, corroborated this, revealing that the miracles were staged. The footage of the "miracles" was filmed and edited to give the impression that the healing had occurred instantaneously, with before-and-after shots spliced together, often months or even a year apart. As Bisola explained, "All you see on TV is the before and after, you don't know the time and space" (BBC Africa Eye, 2024).

Similarly, on 3 March 2025, *Premium Times* published a report by Chinagorom Ugwu, detailing a viral fake miracle associated with a self-proclaimed prophet, Ebuka Obi, of Zion Movement Prayer Outreach in Lagos. The incident began during Obi's Night of Open Heaven, a daily online prayer programme. Obi prophesied that a woman named "Loveth" would soon receive God's favor and experience a breakthrough. He claimed that God had revealed this to him and that it would manifest in her life as a testimony. In February, a woman identifying herself as Loveth Aluu visited the ministry and claimed that Obi's prophecy had come to pass. She asserted that her business, which was on the brink of collapse before the prophecy, had boomed following his words. According to Loveth, she had even purchased a mansion worth N500 million in the Lekki area of Lagos. She declared, "After daddy prophesied to me, things started happening. Money started dropping. I would just stay, and people would be ordering my goods... Zion is the best. This is the last bus stop. I have my evidence here" (Premium Times, 2025).

Ebuka, visibly impressed, requested evidence of Ms. Loveth's claimed success, to which she submitted a video clip showcasing a mansion she purportedly purchased with the proceeds of her thriving business, a result of the prophecy. Upon viewing the video, Ebuka jubilantly celebrated, and the congregation joined in, dancing and clapping. He then fervently prayed and encouraged the attendees to "claim" the miracle, suggesting that they could experience similar divine favor. However, the prophecy was exposed as false days after the testimony, when a video surfaced on Facebook showing Loveth, the so-called "millionaire," selling bottled water and drinks at a small retail shop in Enugu. In the video, she admitted that her earlier testimony at the Zion ministry, where she claimed to have bought a mansion worth N500 million, was fabricated. Loveth was later apprehended by Robo Consult, a construction and real estate firm that owned the mansion she falsely claimed to have purchased. Confronted with the undeniable evidence, Ebuka denied responsibility, attributing the allegations of fake miracles to a priest based in the South-East who, he claimed, had hired bloggers to blackmail the ministry. He vowed to identify and confront the woman (Premium Times, 2025).

In February 2019, a South African-based prophet allegedly performed a miraculous resurrection at a funeral service held in his church. Although he claimed the man in the coffin was dead, a subsequent examination revealed that the individual

was alive and breathing (Satarafikha, 2019). This event deceived thousands into believing that the prophet possessed extraordinary divine powers, leading many to donate their savings, leaving them more financially vulnerable. Similarly, Ghanaian self-proclaimed prophet Nana Poku gained attention for his controversial practice of exorcising demons by kissing female church members. A video footage surfaced showing the prophet passionately kissing a female congregant while a church elder shouted, "Yes Lord, Yes Lord" (Mujaji, 2021, p.202).

In 2014, South African self-styled prophet Lasego Daniel of Rabboni Centre Ministries shocked the public by instructing his followers to eat grass to draw closer to God. A viral video captured dozens of individuals on the ground, consuming grass as per Daniel's instructions. In another bizarre incident, Daniel convinced his followers to drink petrol, claiming that he had transformed it into pineapple juice. Some congregants even asserted that the petrol tasted like pineapple juice, attributing the taste to their faith in the prophet (Mujaji, 2021). Additionally, another prophet gained notoriety for instructing his followers to eat hair, cloth, and other objects, claiming that he had transformed them into food. He was also known for praying over such items, after which the congregation was encouraged to consume them, convinced that the objects had transformed into edible food. Social media platforms circulated photos of this prophet allegedly forcing snakes into the mouths of his congregants during a deliverance session. Despite the seemingly inhumane act, the prophet claimed that the snakes had been miraculously transformed into chocolate, and the individuals accepted the situation, attributing it to their faith in the supposed man of God (Mujaji, 2021).

The one thing common in the instances above is the lies inherent in all the supposed miracles. Each of the miracles came at the command of the prophet or the man of God. It was a demonstration of the power of the prophet rather than the power of God. The fact that miracles are primarily God's act, who decides to whenever he wills, does not make logical sense that the above instances of men commanding God and turning him into a puppet, who is ever ready to do their bidding, is true. The one distinguishing attribute of a fake miracle is that it is based on lies. The examples cited above give credence to this. It is this understanding that now leads us to the exploration of the African value system and the notion of truth among the Igbo people of Southeastern Nigeria.

Towards an understanding of the African Value System and the notion of truth

Every cultural context is governed by established norms and practices that guide the behavior of its members, grounded in principles considered of paramount importance, commonly referred to as values. Ngangah (2020) offers a comprehensive definition of values as the beliefs held by an individual or social group to which they have an emotional commitment, whether in favor of or against particular ideals. These values serve as the driving forces behind cultural dynamics, influencing the lifestyle and daily practices of individuals within a social group, extending to various facets such as

food, clothing, shelter, social organization, and broader personal, social, and environmental needs (Ngangah, 2020).

In the African context, values form a complex framework of principles, knowledge, and beliefs deeply embedded in societies across the continent. They serve as guiding principles for interpersonal, group, and intergroup relations and communication (Blake, 1993, as cited in Ngangah, 2020). These values play a crucial role in ensuring social cohesion and facilitating the efficient functioning of communities, acting as deterrents to behaviors that could undermine societal well-being (Awoniyi, 2015). They encompass religious, political, moral, and social domains, collectively influencing the conduct of community members and contributing to the broader structure of cultural values (Awoniyi, 2015).

Despite the diversity of ethnicities, cultures, and values across African societies, certain core values resonate throughout various cultural groups. These include hospitality, chastity before marriage, truthfulness, respect for elders, commitment to agreements, diligence, and integrity (Awoniyi, 2015). Such values are transmitted through socialization processes, becoming deeply ingrained in the collective consciousness of African communities (Blake, 1993, as cited in Ngangah, 2020). African norms, traditions, and taboos represent unwritten codes of behavior that reflect acceptable standards of conduct across different aspects of life (Ngangah, 2020). These norms establish the boundaries of permissible behavior, shaping individuals' perceptions of what is considered acceptable and unacceptable within their cultural environment.

It is within the framework of this value system that we can begin to explore the concept of truth in Africa, particularly among the Igbo of Southeastern Nigeria. The notion of truth holds considerable significance in Igbo culture. In the Igbo language, truth is represented by the term "Eziokwu." This term is a combination of two components: "ezi," which connotes correctness, genuineness, rightness, or goodness, and "okwu," which signifies word or speech. Hence, "Eziokwu" literally translates to "good talk," "the correct sentence," "the right word," or "the appropriate statement" (Eje, 2019). More specifically, "eziokwu" refers to the accurate response to a question. As Nze (1994:4) succinctly explains, the common understanding among the Igbo is that "eziokwu" – truth – is used to represent true utterances, meaning they are devoid of internal contradictions.

Within the Igbo thought system, truth is intricately linked with several key expressions. For instance, the term "Obughi Eziokwu" translates to "it is not good talk," while "Asi" denotes a "lie" (Eje, 2019). The concept of truth among the Igbo is encapsulated in the term "Eziokwu," which is interpreted as "good talk." To the Igbo, truth is fundamentally associated with being genuine and authentic. This ontological principle is reflected in the maxim "Eziokwu Bu Ndu," which translates to "Truth is life; life is truth." In Igbo ethical and ontological practice, truth transcends moral affirmation; it embodies authenticity and vitality. The true is equated with life, while the false is viewed as a state of non-being or death.

Thus, to be true is to be alive, dynamic, and self-manifesting, whereas to be untrue is to lapse into non-existence or death (Eje, 2019).

In the Igbo language, "Obughi Eziokwu," meaning "it is not good talk," serves as the opposite of "Eziokwu" (good talk), a concept akin to falsity in English. Within Igbo cognition, "Obughi Eziokwu" is used to indicate that a statement does not align with the truth. However, when there is evidence that an individual is deliberately deceiving, "Obughi Eziokwu" acquires a moral dimension and transforms into "Asi," which signifies "lie." At this juncture, the statement transitions from mere inaccuracy to embodying a moral failing, leading to a questioning of the individual's sincerity (Eje, 2019). In Igbo thought, the concept of truth is understood in nuanced degrees. For example, describing a statement as "obughi eziokwu" (it is not good talk) is distinct from labeling it as "asi" (lie). The term "asi" implies a significant moral judgment, negatively affecting an individual's ethical integrity, whereas "obughi eziokwu" does not carry the same moral weight but merely indicates that the statement is inaccurate. It functions as an intermediate between "eziokwu" (good talk) and "asi" (lies), typically used in a cognitive context unless there is evidence of intentional deceit (Eje, 2019).

The Igbo people use a variety of expressions to characterize the nature of truth. For example, the saying "Eziokwu dika ehie" (truth is like noonday) underscores the notion that truth is self-evident and immutable, beyond the power of anyone to obscure or alter. Similarly, the phrase "Anaghị eli eziokwun'ala" suggests that truth cannot be buried or hidden, and "Eziokwu dika afọ ime, adighi ekpu chi ya aka" conveys that truth, like pregnancy, will inevitably reveal itself despite attempts to conceal it (Eje, 2019). These expressions emphasize the indestructible nature of truth in Igbo thought, while also acknowledging that "Eziokwu na'elu ilu," meaning "truth is bitter" (Eje, 2019), reflects the discomfort that truth can sometimes bring.

It is essential to recognize that many Igbo terms are polysemous, possessing multiple meanings that can only be fully understood within specific contexts. This is also true for the concept of truth in Igbo, which can encompass moral, cognitive, or both dimensions. For instance, when the Igbo refer to something as "obughi eziokwu" (it is not good talk), they do not necessarily categorize it as "asi" (lies) unless there is evidence suggesting that the speaker has intentionally communicated falsehoods (Eje, 2019). Within the Igbo conceptual framework, "obughi eziokwu" represents truth in a purely cognitive sense, akin to "falsity" in English (Eje, 2019). However, this cognitive interpretation of "obughi eziokwu" can shift to a moral judgment of "asi" if there is reason to believe that the individual is deliberately spreading falsehoods. The interpretation can also vary depending on the recipient of the statement and their understanding of the context in which "obughi eziokwu" is used (Eje, 2019).

In Igbo culture, morality is intricately linked with the concept of truth. Historically, this connection was exemplified by the

awarding of the "ozo" title only to individuals who were esteemed for their moral integrity and commitment to truth. However, this practice has diminished in many communities today. Despite this shift, the intrinsic link between morality and truth remains a fundamental aspect of Igbo thought. Udefi (2014) aptly observes that "the Igbo would not refer to 'onye asi' (a liar) as knowledgeable, because both knowledge and truth are considered to hold divine and moral significance" (p. 115). The Igbo utilize various methods to ascertain the truthfulness of claims or events. According to Udefi (2014):

It is not enough for the Igbo to see how propositions correspond with facts or the weight of superior logic of the argument, but it is important to consider the person's omume (character), that is, his moral standing within the community is paramount. Thus, for the Igbo, truth verification relies more on first-hand experience or what someone experiences or sees with their eyes together with what one apprehends cognitively. In other words, the reliable way of knowing that is regarded as true or *eziokwu* comes more from what one experiences or sees, and this is why what the Igbo claims to know is what, in the final analysis, is the case or true (p.115).

The preceding discussion emphasizes the central role of truth in shaping human relationships, organizational structures, and moral values. This importance is further highlighted by the Igbo adage: "Eziokwu bu ndu" — "Truth is life." In Igbo culture, truth is not merely an abstract concept but is equated with life itself. As a result, adherence to truth is viewed as a measure of both vitality and morality. In this context, for the Igbo, truth and life are inseparable; those who uphold the truth are considered genuinely alive, while those who disregard it are perceived as lacking life, existing instead in a state of darkness. The commitment to truth, therefore, stands as a foundational principle of Igbo philosophy, essential for maintaining respect for human life and dignity. Given this profound connection between truth and life, the widespread phenomenon of fake miracles in Nigerian churches is particularly troubling, highlighting the urgent need for a reorientation towards the African value of truth.

A Need For a Reorientation on the African Value of Truth (Honesty).

As highlighted earlier in this paper, the crux of the phenomenon of fake miracles lies in deceit and lies. The situation becomes particularly ironic when one considers that truth is a core value in African societies, especially among the Igbo people of Southeastern Nigeria, who hold the saying "Eziokwu bu ndu" — "Truth is life." This irony arises from the fact that these so-called men of God, who share in the African value system of truth, are deeply entrenched in deceit and are poised to deceive their followers for selfish gains. Even more disheartening is that these men of God lead a religion whose founder is considered "The Way and the Truth..." (John 14:6). This juxtaposition underscores the urgent need for a reorientation towards the African value of truth, which is viewed not only as a measure of life but also as a cornerstone of morality. This call for reorientation is justified when we consider the true purpose of miracles within

Christian theology, a purpose that is often missed by many self-proclaimed pastors and prophets.

According to Resane (2017), the essence of miracles in the New Testament is to authenticate the gospel message, with the miracles themselves being a by-product of God's divine will. The primary attribute of a miracle, therefore, is its divine origin — it is not initiated by man. In contrast, many Nigerian miracle workers present a radically different view, where miracles are often initiated by humans, with worshippers looking to the preacher rather than God for the miracles (Resane, 2017). As Antwi (2016) points out, the preachers' intent is not to spread the gospel but to attract attention and convince their audience that they can communicate with the spiritual realm (p.5). In this context, the focus shifts from the message of the gospel to the miracles themselves.

This departure from the New Testament view of miracles, which is to demonstrate God's sovereignty and compassion for humanity, explains the emphasis on stage managed miracles and the resort to occult practices. The pursuit of miracles for personal gain — through commercialization, advertising, and even charging financial fees — further underscores this deviation from the original purpose of miracles (Ademiluka, 2023). These modern-day preachers often view miracles as a commercial venture, using flashy words and promises to gather large crowds, only for the "harvest" to be monetary rather than spiritual (Iheanacho, 2009). As noted by Iroegbu (2005), some miracle workers even perform miracles at the financial cost of their beneficiaries, a practice absent in the ministry of Jesus, who neither charged for his miracles nor sought any personal gain from them.

Jesus' approach to miracles was spontaneous and unpretentious; they occurred naturally, without manipulation or advertising. Resane (2017) notes that Jesus' miraculous acts were not performed with any call toward himself, and they were never commercialized. This stands in stark contrast to the practice of holding "miracle sessions" in churches, where people gather with the expectation that a miracle will occur at a specific time. This contrived approach to miracles not only misrepresents the nature of divine intervention but also constitutes a lie, as it attempts to constrain God's miraculous acts to human-designed schedules.

In light of the African value system, which equates truth with life, it is evident that these so-called miracle workers, by virtue of their deceit, are dead in the eyes of the African ethical framework. They cannot claim to be servants of the one who gives life in abundance (John 10:10) while simultaneously perpetuating lies. The recognition of truth as foundational to life within the African value system must be central to the understanding that only those who uphold the truth are truly alive. For African Christian ministers to maintain authenticity in their ministries, they must embrace the truth and discard the deceit that pervades their practices. Only through this reorientation can they remain aligned with the essence of both their African heritage and their Christian faith.

Conclusion

This study has focused primarily on investigating the widespread phenomenon of fake miracles that have infiltrated churches across Africa, causing significant harm to the faith community. The study also highlighted the inherent irony surrounding the men of God who stage-manage these miracles. This irony lies in the fact that these individuals, who are supposedly ministers of Christ — the "Truth and Life" — come from a cultural background that places a high premium on truth, yet they persist in thriving on deception within their ministries. The research deeply explored the pursuit of miracles in African Christian churches, the prevalence of fake miracles by ministers, the true nature of miracles, and their original purpose within Christian theology. Through this exploration, the study affirms the urgent need for a reorientation on the African value of honesty (truth) as a way to combat the proliferation of fake miracles. The conclusion of the study calls for a return to the core values of truth and integrity, particularly in the context of religious practices, to restore authenticity and ethical alignment in the ministry.

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