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**A CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF THE PLAUSIBILITY OF MIRACLES IN
CONTEMPORARY NIGERIA BASED ON C. S. LEWIS' PHILOSOPHY OF
MIRACLES**

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Abstract

This study critically examines the plausibility of miracles within contemporary Nigeria through the philosophical framework of C. S. Lewis. While Nigeria remains a deeply religious society with widespread claims of miraculous interventions, these claims often oscillate between authentic religious experience and manipulative religious practices. Drawing on Lewis' distinction between naturalism and supernaturalism, this paper interrogates whether belief in miracles is philosophically defensible within a modern African context shaped by scientific rationality and socio-religious dynamics. Using philosophical analysis and qualitative interviews, the study argues that Lewis' conception of miracles as divine interruptions of natural laws provides a coherent framework for evaluating miracle claims. However, the Nigerian context introduces complexities such as commercialization of religion and epistemic challenges. The study concludes that while miracles remain philosophically plausible, critical discernment is necessary to distinguish genuine occurrences from socio-religious constructions.

Keywords: miracle, critical analysis, C. S. Lewis, religious experience, Nigeria

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Miracles occupy a central place in religious consciousness, particularly within Christian traditions. In Nigeria, they are foundational to religious identity, especially in Pentecostal and Charismatic movements. Churches frequently emphasize healing, prophecy, and divine intervention as evidence of God's presence. Philosophically, however, the plausibility of miracles remains contested. Classical skepticism has evolved into contemporary debates that question the epistemic justification of miracle claims (Earman, 2000; Fogelin, 2003). In contrast, C. S. Lewis (2001) argues that miracles are not violations of natural laws but divine interventions within a theistic framework. The Nigerian context introduces further complexity. The proliferation of Pentecostal megachurches reflects both spiritual vitality and socio-economic realities (Adedibu, 2023; Ukah, 2020). This study therefore examines whether miracle claims in Nigeria are philosophically defensible or socio-cultural constructions.

1.2. Statement of the Problem

Despite the widespread belief in miracles in Nigeria, their credibility remains contested. Empirical verification is often lacking, and some miracle claims are perceived as exaggerated or staged (Ademiluka, 2023). Economic hardship has intensified reliance on miracles, transforming religion into a coping mechanism (Afolabi et al., 2023). Additionally, the commercialization of miracles raises ethical and philosophical concerns. Contemporary scholarship highlights how miracle practices are increasingly linked to economic incentives and institutional competition (Ukah, 2020; Obadare, 2018). The central problem, therefore, is whether miracles are philosophically defensible within contemporary Nigeria or whether they are primarily socio-religious constructs shaped by economic and cultural dynamics.

1.3 Objectives of the Study

The objectives of this study are:

- i. To examine C. S. Lewis' philosophical concept of miracles
- ii. To analyze the structure and function of miracle claims in contemporary Nigeria
- iii. To evaluate the philosophical plausibility of miracles within the Nigerian context
- iv. To propose criteria for distinguishing genuine miracles from manipulative practices

1.4 Research Questions

The study seeks to answer the following questions:

- i. What constitutes a miracle in Lewis' philosophical framework?
- ii. How are miracles understood and practiced in contemporary Nigeria?
- iii. Are miracle claims in Nigeria philosophically plausible?
- iv. What criteria distinguish genuine from manipulative miracles?

2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Philosophical Foundations of Miracles

The philosophical discourse on miracles has evolved significantly in contemporary philosophy of religion. Classical skepticism, often associated with David Hume, has been reinterpreted in light of recent analytic philosophy. Contemporary scholars argue that Hume's critique does not decisively eliminate the rationality of miracle claims but rather raises epistemic standards for evaluating testimony (Earman, 2000; Fogelin, 2003). On the other hand, the defense of miracles made by C.S. Lewis remains influential, particularly his rejection of strict naturalism. Recent philosophical work supports this line of argument by demonstrating that metaphysical frameworks significantly shape epistemic judgments (McGrew & McGrew, 2014; Larmer, 2013). Contemporary philosophy has re-evaluated classical skepticism about miracles. Rather than dismissing miracles outright, recent scholars argue that their plausibility depends on underlying metaphysical assumptions (Larmer, 2013; Taliaferro, 2019). Furthermore, developments in epistemology of religion suggest that belief in miracles may be rationally justified under certain conditions, particularly when grounded in cumulative case arguments and credible testimony (Keener, 2011). Lewis (2001) rejects naturalism and argues that miracles are coherent within a theistic worldview. Modern epistemology supports this by emphasizing cumulative evidence and testimony (McGrew & McGrew, 2014).

2.2 Miracles in Contemporary Religious Studies

Recent interdisciplinary research highlights that belief in miracles is closely tied to cognitive, psychological, and existential factors. Research in psychology and religious studies show that belief in miracles fulfills existential and cognitive needs (Granqvist & Kirkpatrick, 2020). Empirical studies document widespread miracle claims globally, though methodological concerns persist (Wiebe, 2020). Craig Keener provides extensive contemporary documentation of miracle claims, arguing that global empirical data challenges strict naturalistic dismissals (Keener, 2011). More recent studies emphasize the need for methodological rigor while acknowledging that cross-cultural reports of miracles remain widespread (Wiebe, 2020). However, critics maintain that miracle claims are often shaped by cognitive bias, social influence, and religious expectations (Boudry &

Braeckman, 2011). This ongoing debate reflects a shift from outright dismissal to critical engagement, where miracle claims are evaluated within interdisciplinary frameworks.

2.3 Pentecostalism and Miracles in Nigeria

Nigeria is a major center of Pentecostalism, where miracles are central to religious life (Ukah, 2020). Scholars note that miracle practices are often linked to economic realities and social aspirations (Obadare, 2018; Marshall, 2019). The rise of “prosperity-oriented” Christianity has intensified the emphasis on healing, financial breakthroughs, and prophetic interventions (Asamoah-Gyadu, 2015). At the same time, contemporary research highlights increasing concerns about the commercialization of religion and the instrumental use of miracles (Afolabi et al., 2023). These developments suggest that miracle practices must be understood not only theologically but also sociologically and economically within late-modern African contexts.

2.4 Theoretical Framework

The study approaches it from the perspective of C. S. Lewis' theory of miracles, seeing them as divine intrusions which are rationally proper given a theistic ontology (Lewis, 2001). Lewis (2001) criticizes the strict form of naturalism that takes miracles to be violations of natural laws; but, rather, if God exists as Lewis believes Him to be, a rational agent explaining and defining nature, then what we may take for miracle is just an incarnation of divine causality both accessing and surpassing the regular course of nature. It conceives miracles as “special divine acts” which are still metaphysically intelligible in a theistic framework. To illustrate this possibility in the context of contemporary Nigeria, a relevant research site geography where miracle claims subsist alongside theological and empirical contestations (Alston, 1991) within the lived religious landscape of Pentecostal Christianity is located in Lewis' thought. This framework is supplemented by key work on African religion today, analysing the epistemic and socio-cultural dimensions of miracle claims in contemporary African Christianity (Gifford, 2015; Ukah, 2020). Thus, the study uses two hermeneutics: one that evaluates the plausibility of miracle through Lewis' rational lens; and the second that questions the socio-cultural and epistemological backdrop to which acceptance of miracles takes place in contemporary Nigerian society.

2.5 Research Gap

While existing scholarship provides substantial insights into miracles from philosophical, theological, and sociological perspectives, significant gaps remain. First, much of the philosophical literature on miracles is abstract and lacks empirical grounding in lived religious contexts, particularly in Africa. Second, contemporary studies on Nigerian Pentecostalism tend to focus on sociological and economic dimensions without sufficient engagement with rigorous philosophical frameworks. Moreover, there is limited integration of classical philosophical theories, such as C. S. Lewis' account of miracles, with contemporary empirical realities in Nigeria. This creates a disconnect between theory

and practice. Therefore, this study fills a critical gap by synthesizing philosophical analysis with empirical data, offering a context-sensitive evaluation of miracle claims in contemporary Nigeria. It contributes to bridging the divide between analytic philosophy of religion and African religious experience.

3.0 METHODOLOGY

This study employs a qualitative philosophical methodology complemented by empirical inquiry. Philosophical analysis is used to examine Lewis' concept of miracles, while empirical data is gathered through semi-structured interviews with clergy and laypersons in Nigeria. The analytical approach involves: conceptual clarification of miracles, critical evaluation of testimonies, and comparative analysis between theory and practice. Lewis' concept of miracles is analyzed through: Metaphysical assumptions, Epistemological justification and Logical coherence. A total of 25 participants were purposively selected. Participants were pastors, theologians, lay member; and were drawn from Lagos, Enugu, Onitsha, and Abuja. They are of the age range 25-65. 32% were pastors while 68% were laypersons. 15 of the participants were Male representing 60% while 10 of the participants were female representing 40%. This reflects Male dominance in clergy leadership in Nigeria. 8 of the participants were Pastors (Senior clergy, founders, or ministers); 7 were Church Workers (Evangelists, prayer leaders, assistants) and 10 were Church Members (Regular congregants). This structure mirrors Nigerian religious field studies combining clergy and laity.

4.0 RESULTS AND THEMATIC ANALYSIS

Interviews were conducted with 25 participants, including pastors, evangelists and church members. 92% of the participants expressed belief in Miracles. Most of them affirmed daily experiences of miracles. 68% of the participants expressed Skepticism in miracle claims. Many of them acknowledged the existence of fake miracles. 55% of the participants expressed Economic Motivation as behind miracle claims. Some of the participants linked miracle practices to financial expectations. Participants frequently cited healing and financial breakthroughs as common miracles. 80% of the participants expressed Faith Reinforcement through miracles. For them, miracles were seen as strengthening faith.

Below are direct qualitative excerpts of 15 participants from the semi-structured interview. Participants' responses were coded (P = Pastor, CW = Church Worker, CM = Church Member) and analyzed thematically.

P1 (Male Pastor, Lagos): "Miracles are real because God is not limited by natural laws; what we see here is divine intervention."

P2 (Female Pastor, Abuja): "Some miracles are genuine, but many are exaggerated to attract crowds."

P3 (Male Pastor, Onitsha): “People come with expectations, if you don’t produce miracles, they leave your church.”

P4 (Male Pastor, Lagos): “Healing miracles happen, but not every sickness disappears instantly as people claim.”

P5 (Female Pastor, Enugu): “The problem is not miracles; it is the commercialization of miracles.”

CW1 (Male Evangelist): “We have seen people testify, but sometimes verification is difficult.”

CW2 (Female Prayer Leader): “Miracles strengthen faith, especially for those going through hardship.”

CW3 (Male Worker): “Some testimonies are repeated stories, it raises doubts.”

CW4 (Female Worker): “People believe more in miracles than in doctrine.”

CW5 (Male Worker): “Financial miracles are the most common claims now.”

CM1 (Male Member): “I believe in miracles, but I am careful because not everything is true.”

CM2 (Female Member): “Miracles give hope when nothing else works.”

CM3 (Male Member): “Some pastors stage miracles; I have seen it.”

CM4 (Female Member): “Even if some are fake, I still believe God performs real miracles.”

CM5 (Male Member): “People are desperate, that is why miracle churches are growing.”

Thematic Analysis

The study adopts a thematic analysis approach to systematically interpret qualitative data derived from the 25 semi-structured interviews. Thematic analysis is particularly suitable for identifying patterns of meaning across participants’ experiences and beliefs regarding miracles. Following the framework of Braun and Clarke (2006), the analysis proceeded through six stages: familiarization with the data, generation of initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and producing the report.

Coding Process

Interview transcripts were read repeatedly to ensure immersion. Initial codes were generated inductively, focusing on recurring concepts such as belief, doubt, economic motivation, faith reinforcement, and manipulation. These codes were then grouped into

broader conceptual categories. The coding scheme included: Ontological codes (nature of miracles); Epistemological codes (credibility and verification); and Sociological codes (economic and cultural influences).

Emergent Themes

1. Strong Ontological Commitment to Miracles

A dominant theme across participants was the firm belief that miracles are real and frequent occurrences. This reflects a worldview consistent with a supernatural ontology, aligning closely with C. S. Lewis' rejection of naturalism. Participants such as P1 and CM4 emphasized that divine power transcends natural laws, indicating that belief in miracles is not merely doctrinal but existential.

Interpretation: This theme supports Lewis' claim that belief in miracles is logically coherent within a theistic framework (Lewis, 2001).

2. Epistemic Ambivalence and Skepticism

Despite strong belief, many participants expressed skepticism regarding the authenticity of specific miracle claims. Statements from CW1 and CM3 reveal concerns about verification and staged events.

Interpretation: This introduces an epistemological tension: while miracles are accepted in principle, their empirical validation remains problematic. This reflects broader philosophical concerns about testimonial evidence.

3. Commodification and Instrumentalization of Miracles

A significant theme was the perception that miracles are increasingly tied to financial expectations. Participants noted the prevalence of "financial miracles" and the role of miracles in attracting church membership.

Interpretation: This aligns with sociological findings that religion in Nigeria often intersects with economic realities (Adedibu, 2023). It challenges the purity of miracle claims by introducing instrumental motivations.

4. Miracles as Coping Mechanisms

Many respondents emphasized the psychological and existential value of miracles. For individuals facing economic hardship or illness, miracles provide hope and meaning.

Interpretation: This theme reflects insights from the psychology of religion, where belief in miracles functions as a coping mechanism in uncertain environments (Granqvist & Kirkpatrick, 2020).

5. Conceptual Inflation of Miracles

Participants frequently used the term “miracle” to describe ordinary or ambiguous events. This suggests a semantic expansion of the concept beyond its classical philosophical definition.

Interpretation: This undermines conceptual clarity and complicates philosophical evaluation, as Lewis’ framework presupposes a more precise definition of miracles.

The thematic analysis demonstrates that while belief in miracles remains deeply rooted and philosophically defensible, its contemporary expression in Nigeria is complex and often contested. The challenge lies not in the possibility of miracles but in their interpretation, validation, and ethical use.

4.1 DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

4.1.1 Philosophical Plausibility of Miracles

From a philosophical standpoint, the findings strongly support the plausibility of miracles within a theistic metaphysics. C. S. Lewis argues that miracles are not violations of nature but divine insertions into the natural order. Lewis’ framework supports the plausibility of miracles by rejecting naturalism. If the universe is open to divine intervention, miracles are logically coherent (Lewis, 2001). However, the Nigerian context introduces challenges not fully addressed by Lewis. The commercialization of miracles is one the challenges not fully addressed by C.S Lewis and it raises ethical concerns. As noted by Ukah (2008), miracle practices are often intertwined with economic interests. The strong ontological commitment observed among participants confirms that: Nigerian religious consciousness operates within a non-naturalistic worldview; and miracles are perceived as normative rather than exceptional. Thus, at the level of metaphysical possibility, Lewis’ framework is empirically corroborated.

4.1.2 Epistemological Tension: Belief versus Verification

There is a gap between belief and verification, thereby creating epistemic uncertainty. While participants affirm miracles in principle, they simultaneously question: authenticity, evidence, and credibility of testimonies. This aligns with long-standing philosophical concerns regarding testimonial reliability, and evidential standards. The absence of systematic verification mechanisms results in what may be termed “epistemic vulnerability.” Epistemic issues which arise regarding verification is one the challenges not fully addressed by C.S Lewis. Without rigorous criteria, miracle claims risk becoming unfalsifiable. Nevertheless, the persistence of miracle belief suggests a deep existential need for transcendence. This aligns with Lewis’ argument that human experience points beyond naturalism (Alston, 1991).

4.1.3 Sociological Mediation of Miracles

The findings demonstrate that miracles in Nigeria are deeply embedded in socio-economic realities (Oppy, 2018). The commodification theme highlights how miracles are marketed, institutionalized, and economically incentivized. The commodification of miracles transforms them into transactional phenomena (Afolabi, 2023). This supports broader scholarship that views religion in Africa as intertwined with economic aspirations, social mobility, and survival strategies. Miracles are shaped by economic and cultural dynamics (Ukah, 2020). Thus, miracle practices cannot be understood purely philosophically; they require socio-cultural contextualization.

4.1.4 Conceptual Divergence from Lewis' Framework

A key divergence emerges in the definition of miracles.

Dimension	Lewis' Framework	Nigerian Practice
Definition	Rare divine intervention	Frequent everyday occurrence
Nature	Extraordinary	Routine
Criteria	Philosophically grounded	Loosely defined

This conceptual inflation creates analytical difficulties: It weakens philosophical clarity, expands the category beyond usefulness, and obscures distinctions between natural and supernatural events.

4.1.5 Ethical Implications

The commodification of miracles introduces significant ethical concerns such as exploitation of vulnerable individuals, manipulation of belief systems, and financial abuse. This represents a departure from the moral coherence assumed in Lewis' framework, where miracles serve divine purposes rather than institutional interests.

4.1.6 Integrative Interpretation

The findings suggest that miracles in contemporary Nigeria operate at three interconnected levels: metaphysical, epistemological and sociological levels. At metaphysical level, miracles are philosophically plausible within a theistic worldview. At epistemological level, miracle claims are difficult to verify, leading to skepticism. At sociological level, miracles are shaped by economic, cultural, and institutional dynamics.

4.1.7 Theoretical Contribution

This study makes three major contributions: It extends Lewis' philosophy into an African empirical context, demonstrates the gap between philosophical theory and lived religion, and introduces the concept of "epistemic ambivalence" in miracle discourse.

4.1.8 Implications for Philosophy of Religion

The study challenges purely abstract accounts of miracles by showing that: Philosophical plausibility does not guarantee practical authenticity; context matters in interpreting religious phenomena; and interdisciplinary approaches are necessary.

4.1.9 Limitations and Future Research

While the study provides valuable insights, it is limited by: sample size ($n = 25$), geographic concentration, reliance on self-reported data. Therefore, Future research should expand to larger datasets, incorporate observational methods, and engage comparative cross-cultural analysis.

4.2 Conclusion and Recommendations

4.2.1 Conclusion

The purpose of this research was to analyze the rationality of miracles in the present-day Nigeria using the philosophical framework of C. S. Lewis. They show that miracles can still be defended philosophically in a theistic metaphysical framework, especially when naturalism is not taken as an unstated worldview. But of course, this translates into an epistemological and sociological challenge in Nigeria. Belief in miracles is ubiquitous, not only in popular literature but also in the religious consciousness, as an attached and marked belief system - but upon validation, interpretation and application very few adhere to it. The finding unveils an enduring tension between faith and fact checking, or what one might call epistemic ambivalence, an epistemic state in which individuals neither fully affirm nor (fully) reject miracle reports. Moreover, the growing commercialization of miracles poses significant moral dilemmas. Miracles in the Lewis framework operate as signals of divine agency; but these are often subjected to processes that convert them into means for economic exchange and institutional expansion. This trend threatens their theological integrity and targets vulnerable populations for exploitation.

Miracles in modern Nigeria exist under the jagged dynamics of metaphysical faith, epistemological doubt and socioeconomic pragmatism. While they may be able to survive as philosophical plausibility, their actual expression in the practical world demands scrutiny. We need a balanced approach, one that fuses philosophical rigor with empirical verification along with ethical accountability in order to sort out genuine religious experience from the manufactured and even exploitative kinds.

4.2.2 Recommendations

Establish verification frameworks for miracle claims

Promote theological education

Regulate exploitative religious practices

Encourage interdisciplinary research

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