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**THE CONTEMPORARY CATHOLIC THEOLOGY
OF MIRACLES**

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written under the supervision of
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ABBREVIATIONS

cann.	canon
CBCN	Catholic Bishops Conference of Nigerian
CCC	Catechism of the Catholic Church
CDF	Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith
cf.	confer
chap.	chapter
Col.	Colossians
1 Cor.	Corinthians
Deut.	Deuteronomy
DH	<i>Dignitatis Humanae</i>
DPM	<i>Divinus Perfectionis Magister</i>
DV	<i>Dei Verbum</i>
e.g.	<i>exempli gratia</i> , for example
ed.	editor
2n. ed.	second edition
eds.	editors
Exod.	Exodus
ff.	and following
Gen.	Genesis
IPH	Instruction on Prayers for Healing
Isa.	Isaiah
Jer.	Jeremiah
LG	<i>Lumen Gentium</i>
loc.	location
Matt.	Matthew
Msgr.	Monsignor
no.	number
Num.	Numbers
para.	Paragraph
PDF	portable document format
Q	<i>Quelle</i> , which is simply the word for source.
rev.	revised
Rom.	Romans

1 Sam.	1 Samuel
SDA	Special Divine Action
sec.	section
SM	<i>Sanctorum Mater</i>
SS.	Saints
St.	Saint
1 Thess.	1 Thessalonian
2 Tim.	2 Timothy
trans.	translated by
UCLA	University of California, Los Angeles
vol.	volume
vols.	volumes

INTRODUCTION

Historical Background

Christianity is a revealed religion which entails self-communication of God to humanity and people's response to God. One of the means and signs of this self-communication is miracle. God revealed himself to his people through signs and wonders he did in their midst. The concept of miracles, the incarnation, death and especially the resurrection of Jesus Christ; the miracle of all miracles, is what one cannot neglect while discussing the foundation of Catholic faith. Moreover, it is pertinent to the understanding of Christian Religion. There is always a paradigm shift in people's knowledge of reality (Christian/Catholic faith) that characterises each epoch in history. This shift can be said to be a defining character in the history of each period. From apostolic era to scholastic, from medieval to modern era, from post-modern (rationalistic) to contemporary age, each has a particular concern which distinguishes it from the other. Catholic Church and her theology is not an exception to these developments being noticed in the progression of history. These changes by no means entail changes in the content of the reality or doctrine but rather in the understanding of it. Biblically, the term miracles is not in the Scriptures, but one can identify salient features of the biblical notions of miracles therein.¹

Furthermore, Augustine's understanding of miracles relied heavily on the Scripture and influenced the patristic era. For him, a miracle is not a special Divine action which violates the ordinary cause of nature. Instead, it is an extraordinary event with a serious and significant effect on the recipient.² He maintained that the most important thing is the message of the miracle and not the extraordinariness of the event. On the other hand, during the medieval period, Thomas Aquinas brought to bay the causal aspect of miracles. He insisted that the cause of authentic miraculous events must be unknown to human knowledge because it is beyond their capacity. The capacity to carry out such an activity lies within the realm of the Supreme Being; that is God.³ In line with the position of Augustine, he maintains that miracles do not violate the laws of nature. Miracles point towards the cause which is possibly Supreme Being. According to Ralph McInerny, Thomas Aquinas's understanding of "*miracle* suggests something full of wonder, whose

¹ Paul Gwynne, *Special Divine Action: Key issues in the Contemporary Debate, 1965-1995* (Rome: Gregorian University Press, 1996), 60.

² Gwynne, 65.

³ Gwynne, 70.

cause is unknown simply and absolutely. This cause is God. Hence what God does outside of causes known to us are called miracles.”⁴ Thomas Aquinas stressed the ontological aspect of the miraculous events.

On the contrary, the enlightenment period, otherwise known as the age of reason brought the influence of religion to the lowest ebb in the history of humanity during the eighteenth century. Rationalists reduced miracles to myths and challenged the ontological understanding of them as propagated by Thomas Aquinas. Philosophers and scientists raised many objections to the issue of miracles. David Hume was vehement in his attack to the possibility and the credibility of miracles. For him, if there is anything like miracle, it must be a violation of the laws of nature which are unalterable. Scientific revolution and the reductionistic tendency of this age almost eroded the influence of miracles in the Christendom. During this period nearly every reality was viewed through the prism of the laws of nature. The First Vatican Council, fought back and countered the position of scientists and philosophers of the enlightenment era with emphasis on the revelatory function of miracles in the Christendom. Accordingly, they said “in order that the submission of our faith should be in accordance with reason, it was God’s will that there should be linked to the internal assistance of the Holy Spirit external indications of his revelation, that is to say divine acts, and first and foremost miracles and prophecies, which clearly demonstrating as they do the omnipotence and infinite knowledge of God, are the most certain signs of revelation and are suited to the understanding of all.”⁵ They underlined the confirmatory function of miracles in line with what we have in the Gospels. They imposed anathema on those who have denied or would deny miracles and their functions. The stance of the First Vatican Council showed an effort to counter the position of the enlightenment period. “Miracles, no less than words, are constitutive elements of revelation. They are the good news itself made visible.”⁶

In the twentieth century, Second Vatican Council came up with a new understanding of miracles in line with the signs of the time. The council explored the anthropological view of the era about the meaning of miracles. The document of the Catholic Church on Divine Revelation, *Dei Verbum*, sees miracles as signs from God. This understanding serves as

⁴ Ralph M. McInerney, *Miracles a Catholic View* (Huntington: Our Sunday Visitor, 1986), 130.

⁵ First Vatican Council, “Dogmatic Constitution on the Catholic Faith, 1869-1870,” in *EWTN Website*, chap.4, On Faith and Reason, accessed November 10, 2017, <http://www.ewtn.com/library/COUNCILS/V1.HTM>.

⁶ René Latourelle, *The Miracles of Jesus and the Theology of Miracles*, trans. Matthew J. O’Connell (New York: Paulist, 1988), 239.

a point of departure on the new understanding of miracles as events that provoke admiration and convey meaning.⁷ This move does not remove the fact that miraculous events are actions of God. Avery Dulles says that in the fourth Gospel “miracles are studied more reflectively from the point of view of their Symbolic or didactic significance.”⁸ Second Vatican Council prefers to talk about miracles as signs of Divine Revelation in and through Jesus Christ. They are signs of Christ bringing the much-anticipated salvation through his words and mighty deeds.

Despite the emphasis on the ontological dimension of miracles and the negative influence of the enlightenment period on the possibility and credibility of miracles, there is a revival and new understanding of miracles as signs from God in the contemporary era starting from Second Vatican Council. The action of the Church in the sense of issuing instructions on how to approach extraordinary events recently confirms the current interest in the supernatural manifestations. Another instance is the poll “‘Do You Believe in Miracles?’ asked the July 1991 issue of *Life* magazine. According to a Gallup poll 83 percent of Americans answered, ‘Yes.’”⁹ There are countless miraculous events and apparitions’ claims all over the world.

Furthermore, the contemporary Catholic theologians, Karl Rahner, Avery Dulles, René Latourelle, John Paul II, Walter Kasper, Benedict XVI, Johann Baptist Metz, Paul Gwynne, René Laurentin and Louis Monden, are of the opinion that miracles are signs and means of God’s self-communication to humanity. “In the gospel tradition, the miracles of Jesus function as signs and mediations of the coming reign of God. They are presented not as the reports of detached observers, but as the testimony of believers. They are of their very nature signs, signs that bear on salvation. They are signs that summon a person to conversion and commitment to the way of the reign of God.”¹⁰ Walter Kasper remarked that biblical understanding of miracles emphasised the intentional aspect than the causal aspect. He says that “in describing the miracles of Jesus the Bible never uses just the normal ancient term *térata*, which always had the undertone of the miraculous, but interprets this term by means of two others, ‘acts of power’ (*dunameis*) and ‘signs’ (*séméia*). These signs are extraordinary, unexpected events which provoke amazement

⁷ Gwynne, *Special Divine Action*, 94.

⁸ Avery Dulles, *A History of Apologetics* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock, 1999), 9.

⁹ Lisa J. Schwebel, *Apparition, Healings and Weeping Madonnas* (New York: Paulist, 2004), 8.

¹⁰ Denis Edwards, *How God Acts: Creation, Redemption, and Special Divine Action* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2010), 87.

and wonder.”¹¹ Miracles are supernatural signs made visible. Equally, Karl Rahner reiterated the sign aspect of a miracle, saying “a miracle in the New Testament is a *semeion*, a sign, that is, the manifestation of God’s salvific activity in grace and in revelation.”¹²

In the contemporary period, the emphasis is on the semiological aspect of miracles without abandoning their psychological element of wonder. This sign is symbolic which distinguishes it from any other arbitrary sign in the world. “According to this approach, revelation never occurs in a purely interior experience or an unmediated encounter with God. It is always mediated through symbol—that is to say, through an externally perceived sign that works mysteriously on the human consciousness so as to suggest more than it can clearly describe or define.”¹³ Theological inquiry in the contemporary era is primarily interested in the historical aspect of miracles and not in their nature. That is the verifiable signs that caught the attention of the people involved.

Moreover, the discourse on miracles in the contemporary era can only be meaningful when linked with the person of Christ and his works. In the words of René Latourelle, “miracles are inseparable from Christ who is their source, inseparable from a salvation that affects the entire human person and the world that is the person’s dwelling, inseparable from conversion and kingdom, of which they are visible face and attestation, and inseparable, finally, from the revelation of which they, along with Christ’s words, are an integral part.”¹⁴ Hence, it links the mighty signs to the person of Jesus Christ. “Since God is *dynamis*, *logos*, and *agape*, the signs by which Jesus reveals his glory are signs manifesting power (miracles and resurrection), holiness (life, passion, and death), and wisdom (teaching through actions and words). Because Jesus is the Son of the Father in the Trinity and shares the knowledge, power, and love of the Father, the signs he gives are reflections in our world of the glory that is his.”¹⁵

Significance and Methodology

In this research, attention will be focused on the contemporary Catholic theological understanding of miracles which is based on the meaning and functions of the miracles

¹¹ Walter Kasper, *Jesus the Christ* (New York: Continuum, 2011), 80.

¹² Karl Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith*, trans. William V. Dych (New York: Crossroad, 1978), 258.

¹³ Dulles, *History of Apologetics*, 130.

¹⁴ Latourelle, *The Miracles of Jesus and the Theology of Miracles*, 4.

¹⁵ Latourelle, 3.

as signs from God to humanity. This idea is in line with René Latourelle stance that “theology today is interested in the mysteries, not only in themselves but also, and even more, in what they mean for human beings and their salvation. This trend is a reflection of contemporary thought for which the human person is the centre of everything, a point of universal reference.”¹⁶ With the new development in the information technology and access to information in this period, the urgency of theological analysis of miracles is highly stressed now more than ever. The study will certainly help people to make an informed judgement about the alleged claims of miraculous events, especially when the Church has not made any official pronouncement about a particular claim of a miraculous event. Moreover, there is need to guard against credulity while accepting the reality of miracles in this era. The need is justified by the wanton quest for extraordinary events in this era which can lead one astray in the name of seeking for Divine intervention if care is not taken. In other words, some people tend to see external phenomena as the only way God can manifest his providence in the world. In the words of Guiseppe Tanzella-Nitti, “affirming the reality of miracles can be an expression of genuine openness to transcendence and the possibility of divine revelation, aided by a corresponding rational, philosophical judgment. On the other hand, this affirmation can degenerate into a credulity divorced from reason, an approach that seeks anxiously to find the divine where it is not, or worse, attempts to subject the divine to human control by the practice of magic.”¹⁷ This is a problem which seems to be increasing because of the access to information these days both censored and uncensored. “In the early part of 20th century modernism and liberal criticism tended to reject miracles as absurd. Today the situation has changed. There is growing interest in exceptional phenomena, which in some cases has progressed so far as to degenerate into irrational desire for the marvelous in religion,”¹⁸ Mary Valentine asserts. The correct understanding and the analysis of miraculous events in this contemporary period will help to guide people towards accepting only the credible and coherent miraculous events.

The best attitude with which to approach the study of miracles should be that of an open mind, and that will guard against the two extremes of credulity and scepticism. Just as St. Paul reminded the people, “do not quench the Spirit. Do not despise the words of

¹⁶ Latourelle, 9.

¹⁷ Giuseppe Tanzella-Nitti, “Miracles,” in *Interdisciplinary Encyclopedia of Religion and Science*, eds. G. Tanzella-Nitti and A. Strumia, (2017): I, <http://doi.org/10.17421/2037-2329-2002-GT-4>.

¹⁸ Mary Hester Valentine, *Miracles* (Chicago: Thomas More, 1988), 19.

prophets, but test everything; hold fast to what is good” (1Thess 5: 19-21).¹⁹ Christ was against people seeking a miraculous sign as a condition necessary to believe in God. Theologians must clarify the meaning and purpose of miraculous occurrences, and correctly channel people’s spiritual desire. The research hopes to contribute towards making this call a reality through elucidation of miraculous events from the Catholic point of view. It is the task of the Church and her theologians to guide and present authentic understanding of the concept “miracles” in the contemporary period. Indeed, it is not an attempt to suppress the manifestations of the supernatural by the Church’s hierarchies and theologians instead they guard against confusion and abuse by some unscrupulous people. The Church does this by providing guidelines that will help theologians in the verification of the authenticity of any miraculous event.

The structure of the thesis is configured in a way to suit the topic which is an attempt to synthesise and analyse different authors understanding of miracles in the contemporary period. It is not a historical account of theological development about miracles. Each chapter builds on the other leading to a conclusion. The thesis is divided into four chapters; chapter one will deal with the theological understanding of miracles. Here, the thesis will consider miracles as means and signs of Divine Revelation in the Scriptures and its contemporary understanding. Moreover, the consideration of the general theological concept of miracles as Divine signs which includes definitions is part of this chapter. Equally, miracles as multivalent signs are given due attention from the contemporary Catholic theological understanding. The detailed analysis of different meanings of miracles as signs goes a long way to support the contemporary understanding of miracles.

Chapter two will focus attention on the post-biblical miracles and their classifications. In other words, called private Revelations; that is all the miracles in the history of the Church after the death of the last apostle. Just as the name of the caption goes, it includes Eucharistic miracles, healings (medical miracles), apparitions, miracles of the saints, miraculous images, stigmata, and locution. Because of the rampant news of alleged apparitions and Revelations in recent times, attention will be dedicated to clarifying what they entail in the life of people and their salvation. They are not new Revelations but serves as an aid to faith calling people’s attention to the original Gospels’ proclamations.

¹⁹ 1 Thess. 5:19-21 (New Revised Standard Version, 1989).

In chapter three, the research will present warrants for the possibility and credibility of miracles in the midst of so many criticisms levelled against them. In this chapter, the study will establish the context for the possibility of miracles and their historical authenticity. The dissertation will briefly analyse the difficulties against miraculous claims and present the theological position on extraordinary events. This entails presenting Christian belief in miracles as coherent and credible as possible.

Finally, chapter four will concentrate on the recognition of miracles and their functions. The recognition, significance, and functions of miracles in the lives of Christians will be considered here. With the two kinds of recognition of miracles, spontaneous and theological, the research will try to establish criteria for a genuine miracle. The former is factual while the latter is systematic. The teaching of the Church as represented by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith and the Congregation for the Causes of Saints will guide the process of theological recognition. The dialogue between theology and science especially medical science in the process of canonical trial of miraculous events will be explained. Furthermore, the functions of miracles, Revelation, attestation, faith, Christian living and salvation will be elucidated in details in this chapter. The conclusion will come finally. This structure will contribute to the originality of the dissertation.

The topic of the dissertation warrants some restrictions that will help in making the thesis coherent. First, the use of the term “miracles” in the contemporary era may likely be a problem for any researcher if not defined. There are some reservations in the use of the word “miracles” in the contemporary era by different people. Most of the events people regard as miraculous may likely not be miracles in a strict sense. We have miraculous drugs, miraculous opportunities, miraculous economy, miracles of technology, scientific miracles and so on.²⁰ In this research, the term miracles is restricted to special Divine acts in the context of faith which are perceptible to the senses. Other miracles which are not within the confines of the research as defined are not of interest to the thesis.

Second, this research is based on the perspective of fundamental theology which has miracles as one of its central themes. That is a positive explication of the terms and apologetically defending its credibility as regards the religious values of such concept. Third, the research considers the contemporary period as the duration that spans from Second Vatican Council till 2017. This research is not in any way at all rejecting all that

²⁰ Valentine, *Miracles*, 7.

has been said before, but it is an attempt to present them in the light of contemporary view as the theologians of this period have done. It is interesting to note that views expressed here are restricted to that of Catholic Church and her theologians because of the topic of the research. However, there are one or two non-Catholic authors who agree with Catholic views on miracles that were included. Their works act as supporting material to the Catholic theologians' works. Be that as it may, this research may occasionally refer to authors or works beyond this time range stipulated when necessary. On the one hand, the thesis will follow the traditional library research methodology to collect materials and data for this work. Furthermore, the thesis is somewhat limited with regard to the materials available for the research. There are other works that deal with this topic that are in different languages other than the English language. Hence, the research is restricted only to the English literature.²¹ The study looks at the Scripture and sacred tradition as sources of light on the notion of miracles. It is a clear teaching of the Catholic Church that sacred tradition and sacred Scripture make up a single deposit of the word of God which is entrusted to the Church.²²

The contemporary Catholic theology of miracles is both challenging and fascinating to theologians and non-theologians alike. It is interesting in the sense of what it entails for the faith and salvation of humanity. On the other hand, it is challenging when one considers the rationalistic and circular nature of the modern society in which the influences of scientific and the technological developments are so noticeable. However, Catholic faith cannot be reduced only to external phenomena as miracles, but the Church insists that God has revealed himself to humanity through miracles. Miracles lead and aid faith in the Almighty God who has manifested himself through such wonders in salvation history. "The fundamental conviction among Christians that God has really acted and continues to act in history, both to reveal himself and to draw people to the fullness of salvation, is not without its opponents even from within the Christian community itself."²³ Hence, the need to clarify and elucidate miracles as they concern Catholic faith which has

²¹ For instance, Marian Rusecki (1942-2012), who was a professor of fundamental theology at the John Paul II Catholic University of Lublin, Poland and considered as the best expert on theology of miracle in Poland. He released a book in Polish, *Traktat o Cudzie* (Treatise on Miracle) (Lublin: Komitet Nauk Teologianych Pan, Wydawnictwo KUL, 2006), and in German, *Gottes Wirken in der Welt: Dimensionen und Funktionen des biblischen Wunderbegriffs* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang Europäischer Verlag der Wissenschaften, 2001).

²² McNerny, *Miracles a Catholic View*, 31.

²³ Gwynne, *Special Divine Action*, 20.

its foundation in the resurrection of Jesus Christ, the miracle of all miracles, in this contemporary age.

CHAPTER ONE

THEOLOGICAL UNDERSTANDING OF MIRACLES

The primary concern of this chapter is of threefold: First, it will look at the biblical notions of miracles in the Old Testament and the New Testament as means and signs of Divine Revelation. Second, it is going to take up the general concept of miracles and analyse the meaning it portends for the contemporary theologians. The definition of miracle is part of the consideration of this chapter. Third, it is going to consider miracles as sign-events. This chapter has as its focus on public Revelation. That is to say, all the miracles in the Scripture that are part of the Divine Revelation. These miracles are articles of our faith. They are valid all the time. “*Dei Verbum*: Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation,” made it clear that “the Christian dispensation, therefore, as the new and definitive covenant, will never pass away and we now await no further new public revelation before the glorious manifestation of our Lord Jesus Christ.”²⁴

1.1. Miracles as Signs and Means of Divine Revelation According to Holy Scriptures

God’s encounter with his people takes place in the concrete reality of the world, and not in an intellectual world of reality. God manifested himself in the socio-cultural milieu of the people at different points in time. That is to say, their experiences of God’s manifestation left deep impressions on their lives. Miracle is one of the means and signs of Divine Revelation which undoubtedly affects people’s understanding of the reality. It is an experience of a Divine reality which invariably continues in the form of a relationship. The historical events in the lives of the people of Israel manifest the omnipotence of God. God miraculously led the people from slavery to the Promised Land. The teaching of the Church about miracles in the *Catechism of Catholic Church*, confirms the role of miracles in the Divine Revelation. It says, “so ‘that the submission of our faith might nevertheless be in accordance with reason, God willed that external proofs of his Revelation should be joined to the internal helps of the Holy Spirit.’ Thus the miracles of Christ and the saints... ‘are the most certain signs of divine Revelation.’”²⁵ The statement

²⁴ Second Vatican Council, “*Dei Verbum*: Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation,” (hereafter DV), (November 18, 1965): no. 4, http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19651118_dei-verbum_en.html.

²⁵ Catholic Church, *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, (hereafter CCC), (Vaticana: Libreria Editrice, 2003), no.156, http://www.vatican.va/archive/ENG0015/_INDEX.HTM.

of *Catechism of Catholic Church* reflects the position of Vatican I about the function of miracles on behalf of Revelation.²⁶ The duty of miracles as external signs of Divine Revelation go a long way in making understanding of miracles clearer. To establish the fact of Revelation to a believer, Avery Dulles finds solace in miracles. He says, “the miracles, the testimony of the martyrs, the teaching of the prophets and that of the Church itself, while they function, under one aspect, as rationally convincing signs of credibility, may also be seen from another point of view as ‘mediate revelation.’ They are vehicles by which God makes his authority concretely present to the believer.”²⁷ Through miracles, individuals come closer to God to accept his gesture of love, but this attraction should not be understood as coercion. That is to say, miracles serve as an external proof of Divine Revelation, and not to make reason basis for people’s faith alone. Miracle stories in the Bible serve this purpose for the people. The Divine Revelation is not an abstract idea that has its existence in the spiritual world only; rather it comprises of both spiritual and physical nature. It is God’s self-communication of his being to humanity actualised in time and mediated through words and events. “God’s revelation, if it is to come home to human beings as embodied spirits, must come to expression through tangible, social, and historically transmitted symbols,”²⁸ says Avery Dulles. Miracles understood as God’s Revelation are tangible, social, historical, and symbolic. The symbolic nature of the event certainly leads beyond the visual encounter with the reality symbolised. The symbolic reality has the power to reshape minds towards deepening relationship with God. René Latourelle contends that “the first function of miracle, with respect to revelation, is thus to signify the presence and benevolent approach of the God of love and to dispose the soul to hear His good news.”²⁹

A Revelation on a day-to-day usage means to show, appear, manifest, disclose, and display something not known before. In other words, it entails bringing to the knowledge of a person in question something *ab initio* unknown to them. Most often it is startling.³⁰ Types of Revelation according to G. O’Collins include general and special Revelations. General Revelation means all the knowledge of God acquired by considering the wisdom in the natural order and beauty of the created world.³¹ This kind of Revelation is open to

²⁶ First Vatican Council, “Dogmatic Constitution on the Catholic Faith, 1869-1870,” in *EWTN Website*, sec. 3, accessed April 10, 2017, <http://www.ewtn.com/library/COUNCILS/V1.HTM>.

²⁷ Avery Dulles, *The Assurance of Things Hoped for* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 57.

²⁸ Avery Dulles, *Craft of Theology: from Symbol to System* (New York: Crossroad, 1992), 22.

²⁹ René Latourelle, *The Theology of Revelation* (New York: St. Paul, 1966), 402.

³⁰ Gerald O’Collins, *Rethinking Fundamental Theology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 57.

³¹ O’Collins, 58.

all human beings. God's providence in conserving the world and every created reality necessitates people putting their trust in him. Nevertheless, for the people of Israel, their actual encounter with God is more important than the Divine manifestation through nature.³² On the other hand, special Revelation is the supernatural manifestation of God in the history of humanity. The records of miraculous stories in the Old Testament, New Testaments, and life of the Church are instances of this. God reveals himself as merciful, loving, and caring God to human beings in history. "Primarily, revelation is the act of God, seen in the progressive unfolding of His eternal plan of salvation in Christ, by which He manifests and communicates Himself to people, calls the Church into being, and invites the loving response of assent and obedience."³³ The content of Divine Revelation came to a definitive end with the Christ-event and with the death of the last apostle, John. However, the task of the Church since apostolic era is not to communicate new Revelation, but to transmit the Revelations already received, to give an authentic interpretation of them, to show their credibility, and to spell out what they entail in our lives.³⁴ These duties of the Church clearly bring out the historical nature of God's Revelation.

With the Second Vatican Council's document, *Dei Verbum*, Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation, Revelation came to be understood as a free self-communication of God to humanity. Moreover, as communication, people are urged to respond in faith by entering into a relationship with God, the revealer and the revealed.³⁵ Divine self-communication does not in any way reduce the attribute of God as an infinite being. This Divine self-communication if properly understood, should be in line with our encounter with God in a grace-filled atmosphere in which we come to the knowledge of the reality of God himself. When people receive the giver who is equally the gift, they are bound to change in line with the gift. Karl Rahner in his summation says, "Divine self-communication means, then, that God can communicate himself in his own reality to what is not divine without ceasing to be infinite reality and absolute mystery, and without man ceasing to be a finite existent different from God."³⁶ The unity of the words and deeds is so strong in the events of Divine Revelation that they cannot stand alone. They are

³² O'Collins, 59.

³³ J. Jensen, "Revelation, Concept of (in the Bible)," in *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, 2nd ed., ed. Berard L. Marthaler (Detroit: Gale, 2003), 12:187.

³⁴ Dulles, *The Assurance of Things Hoped for*, 190.

³⁵ O'Collins, *Rethinking Fundamental Theology*, 66.

³⁶ Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith*, 119.

intertwined, such that separating them leads to substantial loss of their meanings. Revelation according to the Bible comes primarily through the word of God. The word of God includes spoken words and written symbols. “The word of God, in its full biblical sense, includes God’s revelatory deeds...The whole Bible bears witness to the salvific and punitive actions by which God intervenes in history. These deeds have value not simply as confirmatory signs, bearing out the Prophets’ declarations, but also as significant gestures. They are themselves revelatory, at least when accompanied by the commentary of prophetic interpretation.”³⁷ The document of the Church on Divine Revelation, *Dei Verbum*, emphasises the inner unity that exists between the deeds and words in God’s plan of Revelation. According to the document, “this plan of revelation is realized by deeds and words having an inner unity: the deeds wrought by God in the history of salvation manifest and confirm the teaching and realities signified by the words, while the words proclaim the deeds and clarify the mystery contained in them.”³⁸ The words are necessary to discern the extraordinary events in history, God’s relationship with human beings. The necessity of the words is so because God is a mystery. Albeit, God has revealed himself, he is still a mystery. These events are always symbolic and need interpretation. In other words, miracles are real words in the physical realm. The revelatory events are symbolic by nature as mentioned before. The symbol is a type of a sign, “a sensible reality (word, gesture, artifact, etc.) that betokens that which cannot be directly perceived, properly described, or adequately defined by abstract CONCEPTS.”³⁹

It is a general knowledge among Catholic theologians that Christianity is a revealed religion. Moreover, it is correct to seek historical evidence with which to prove that the Revelation is from God. As already mentioned, miracles provide such data in conjunction with other signs. Avery Dulles commenting on the necessity of signs in the Divine Revelation says that “the Rousselot School would seem to be correct in holding that no one can adhere to a specific revelation unless that revelation is mediated through some created signs, whether interior or exterior, which is discerned to be from God.”⁴⁰ Even though there is a difference between beginners, who tend to rely on the physical signs and those who are advanced in faith who do not depend on the physical signs as such. In the

³⁷ Avery Dulles, “Revelation, Theology of,” in *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, 2nd ed., ed. Berard L. Marthaler (Detroit: Gale, 2003), 12:196.

³⁸ DV, 2.

³⁹ Avery Dulles, “Symbol in Revelation,” in *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, 2nd ed., ed. Berard L. Marthaler (Detroit: Gale, 2003), 13:662.

⁴⁰ Dulles, *The Assurance of Things Hoped for*, 214.

same vein, Karl Rahner maintains that miracles are not *facta bruta*, but signs with an aim to achieve and with a specific addressee. It is directed to a knowing subject in a historical situation. For him, a miracle that is not a sign will be an absurd notion.⁴¹ Miracles serve as signs of God's love, authenticating signs manifesting Divine mandate of the message and mission of the disciples, as signs of coming kingdom of redemption, as signs of Christ glory, as symbols of sacramental economy, as a sign of the transformation of the end-time, and signs of faith. Peter in his Pentecost proclamation has this to say about Jesus Christ, "a man attested to you by God with deeds of power, wonders, and signs that God did through him among you" (Acts 2:22). Similarly, Edwards Denis is of the opinion that miracles of Jesus are signs and mediate the coming reign of God. These miracles are testimonies of those who placed their faith and trust in Jesus Christ. They are signs manifesting God's plan of salvation and at the same time summon one into deepening one's relationship with God.⁴² These signs challenge and summon people to act in response to the message they have received. It is a new awareness on the part of the recipient. The capacity to respond positively or negatively is contingent on the person's disposition.

The mediators of the God's self-communication are as wide as the means of Divine Revelation. The range is from Jesus down to a layperson in a remote corner of the world. However, some are more favoured by God than others like prophets, apostles, leaders, saints, and mystics, just to name but a few. The Revelation of Jesus Christ is the manifestation of the Triune God. "The revelation in Christ is at the same time the revelation of the Holy Trinity; that is, the manifestation of the internal life of God Himself. Christ explicitly says that the Father appears to men in the Son. Whoever sees him sees the Father (John 14:9)."⁴³

Interestingly, the means of God's self-communication is wide, common and uncommon, which may include positive and negative experiences.⁴⁴ These experiences abound in the Old Testament, New Testament, and life of the Church. Moreover, one of the means of Revelation or self-communication of God's saving agenda is miracle. Miraculous event in the history of salvation is one of the means through which God visibly manifests

⁴¹ Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith*, 258.

⁴² Denis Edwards, *How God Acts*, 87.

⁴³ Thomas Paniker, *Theology of Revelation and Faith*, 45, accessed April 18, 2017, <https://ia801407.us.archive.org/20/items/TheologyOfRevelationAndFaith/RevelationAndFaith.pdf>.

⁴⁴ O'Collins, *Rethinking Fundamental Theology*, 75.

himself to his people. “God’s revelation takes place in history and the history of God with man is both object and the means of his revelation.”⁴⁵ This event cuts across Old Testament and New Testament showing the importance of miraculous deeds in the issue of Revelation. “The focal message of the Old Testament is the liberation of Israel from the slavery of Egypt through Moses; that of the New Testament, the deliverance of mankind from death of sin through Jesus Christ.”⁴⁶ One should reject the temptation of placing their faith in the miraculous events; rather one should trust God who reveals himself through these actions.

The greatest miracles are that of Jesus Christ especially his resurrection, which is the miracle of all miracles. Resurrection is the apex of all the miraculous events. Gerald O’Collins sums it up when he says, “among the means by which that revelation came, one must also remember the miracles performed by Jesus and the unique event of the resurrection. Nothing could be more ‘extraordinary’ or ‘uncommon’ than his victory over death, the beginning of the new creation.”⁴⁷ The fullness of Revelation comes with the Christ-events. Somehow we cannot talk about the past, present, and future Revelations which are a bit confusing at face value without any explanation. For instance, Christ-event took place more than two thousand years ago, and it is the final Revelation, and we are still talking about ongoing and future Revelation. The present and future Revelations are they addition or what? According to Norbert Schiffrers, they are referred as dependent Revelation in the sense that they rest on foundational Revelation. The resurrection of Christ gives new meaning to individuals’ relationship with God and extraordinary events in our history.⁴⁸ Without the resurrection of Christ we should be pitied, says Paul (1 Cor.15:19). Moreover, the resurrection is the miracle of all miracles. Here God revealed his plans of salvation for humanity and his abundant love and mercy. Other miracles are meaningful when considered from the perspective of the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

The purposes of Divine Revelation are the unveiling of God’s plans of salvation and redemption of the world and the people’s response to this gesture of love and mercy from God.⁴⁹ Miracle and Revelation are inseparable, the visible aspect and invisible aspect of the same mystery. “Thus, miracle predisposes towards revelation; it authenticates

⁴⁵ Norbert Schiffrers, “Revelation,” in *Encyclopedia of Theology: A Concise Sacramentum Mundi*, ed. Karl Rahner (New York: St. Paul, 1975), 1454.

⁴⁶ Dulles, “Revelation,” 97.

⁴⁷ O’Collins, *Rethinking Fundamental Theology*, 77.

⁴⁸ Schiffrers, “Revelation,” 1458.

⁴⁹ Paniker, *Theology of Revelation and Faith*, 12.

revelation as divine word; it prefigures revelation in our world.”⁵⁰ The miraculous events have the characteristic of calling people closer to God to experience his gesture of mercy and love. When we encounter God’s mercy and love, we cannot but praise him. This gesture abounds in the Scripture from different perspectives. “As a matter of fact, miracle is a polyvalent sign. Like many other Christian realities, it acts on several planes at once, it points in different directions. It is in the Gospel that this diversity of aspects appears at its best, for the miracles of Christ are the archetypes of every true miracle. All the miracles in the lives of the Saints borrow from this splendor without ever exhausting it.”⁵¹

1.1.1. Miracles in the Old Testament

Old Testament is the history of salvation and God’s plans to restore humanity to his original position before the fall. God chose the people of Israel as a vessel to achieve his purpose and manifested himself in various ways to them. He revealed his divinity and his commandments through the mighty wonders to liberate and protect Israel as his vehicle of salvation. In the Bible, we may not find the word ‘Revelation’ as a noun, but as a verb describing the notion of Revelation. When Revelation is mentioned in the Bible, what is envisioned is the manifestation of God to his people. Where he reveals his power, glory, his salvific plans, and will in human history. From the perspective of the Old Testament, the content of Divine Revelation is both indicative and imperative, and in each respect normative. Hence, God’s Revelation at this stage comes with obligations expected to be fulfilled by the people.⁵²

Equally, from the biblical point of view, there is no term corresponding strictly to “miracles” as it is in theological parlance today. The Latin word *miraculum*, meaning miracle, appears only six times in the Vulgate Old Testament for some number of Hebrew terms meaning wondrous acts or events.⁵³ However, they used other words that expressed wonder which equally revealed something about the Supreme Being. “In the Old Testament, the terms most used to indicate God’s “miraculous” interventions are “sign” (Heb. *’ôṭ*), “prodigious work” (Heb. *môpet*), and also “great deeds of God” (Heb. *gedulôṭ*). Less present, however, is the simple idea that wonder is something

⁵⁰ Latourelle, *The Theology of Revelation*, 403.

⁵¹ Latourelle, 389.

⁵² Paniker, *Theology of Revelation and Faith*, 12.

⁵³ C. Sant and R. F. Collins, “Miracle,” in *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, 2nd ed., ed. Berard L. Marthaler (Detroit: Gale, 2003), 9:661.

extraordinary that astonishes.”⁵⁴ Most often the usage of these terms does not mean that they are beyond nature’s capacity to execute such events.

There are many miraculous stories in the Pentateuch and historical books than in any other book in the Old Testament especially in the context of their liberation from Egypt.⁵⁵ These deeds are symbolic, and through them, God manifested his attribute of omnipotence, and powerfully led the people of Israel into the Promised Land. There is a purpose for miracles in the Old Testament which in no way at all rest content with amusement. According to Mary Valentine, “the express purpose of the Jewish miracles is to confirm the natural evidence of one God, creator of all, and to display his attributes and will with distinctness and authority, to enforce the obligation of religious observances and the sinfulness of idolatrous worship.”⁵⁶ These interventions have a message to pass, and through them, God builds a new relationship with the people. The most important thing is the meaning of the miraculous event which is beyond the amazement of the event. It is only God; the Omnipotent Being that can perform such mighty works. “God’s power is often seen in everything that appears wonderful, mysterious, surprising, awe-inspiring or astonishing. Actions manifesting such power are called *nifla’ôt* (wonderful deeds) of God (Ex 3.20; 34.10; Josh 3.5; Jgs 6.13; Jer 21.2; Ps 9a.2), or *pela’ôt* (marvels) of God [Ex 15.11; Ps 76 (77).15; Jgs 13.18]. When these terms are used in regard to men, they indicate something beyond them.”⁵⁷

On the issue of the nature of miracles from the Old Testament standpoint, Israelites have no idea of the so-called laws of nature which is unalterable. They believe in God’s providence, and such magnificent works are signs from God. The rise and fall of a king, the bountiful and failed harvest are attributed to God as blessings and punishments, rather than political or natural phenomena. For them, God controls the stability and reliability of the world and nothing like natural laws.⁵⁸

More still, the terminologies above interestingly show that miracles are signs that point beyond the events in particular. When people believe in the existence of God, what extraordinary works entail become clearer to them. It is evident to the people of Israel that miracles are signs of God’s goodness and love to them. “For the Israelite the concept

⁵⁴ Tanzella-Nitti, “Miracles,” VI.

⁵⁵ Tanzella-Nitti, VI.

⁵⁶ Valentine, *Miracles*, 27.

⁵⁷ Sant and Collins, “Miracle,” 662.

⁵⁸ Paul Gwynne, *Special Divine Action*, 61.

of a miracle is never divorced from that of a sign; a miracle takes place at a particular time, for a particular need, to demonstrate God's marvelous intervention in behalf of his covenanted people."⁵⁹

God is transcendent and cannot be seen or understood, in the sense that, he is a mystery to humanity. On the contrary, God is immanent as well. Some signs allowed the people of Old Testament to come to the knowledge of the Supreme Being in the course of their history. The initiative is from God, and theirs is to respond to the gesture from him by obeying his commands. Words are very significant in clarifying the meaning of events, but that does not mean that events are less important. The words will be meaningless if there is no event to be clarified. Some of these phenomena include dreams, sickness, vision, conquest, exile and restoration. For the fact that most of these wonders are naturally explainable, they are not acceptable in secular history as Revelation of Supreme Being. Nevertheless, people have accepted them on the ground of faith and was enlightened more by the Divine interpretation that accompanied them.⁶⁰ Concerning the Old Testament miracles, the discernment of the literary forms in the books containing miracle-stories is a necessity. The interpretation of miraculous stories is to ascertain the proper use of the stories. They serve as literary forms with which to convey a message sometimes. The interpretation should be done with every sense of responsibility not to accept more than necessary or vice versa. The reason for this is so because "the wisdom form of literature makes full use of fictional devices; in such an instance the wonder narrative may be a purely literary artifice."⁶¹ Without this interpretation the meaning of such event is incomprehensible. Most miraculous acts in the Old Testament were mediated by the prophets or the leaders of the people. They as well did interpret the meaning of the miraculous events for the people.

When considering the healings in the Old Testament, we have to remember that they are narratives about God's relationship with his chosen people historically. Certainly, they differ from other documents in history about healings in some pagans shrines in the Ancient Near East and Greek world. We have some known healing shrines like *Aesculapius* and others where people seek healing. The people of Ancient Near East understood sickness as luck or fate from gods rather than being a consequence of failing

⁵⁹ Valentine, *Miracles*, 28.

⁶⁰ Jensen, "Revelation," 188.

⁶¹ Sant and Collins, "Miracle," 662.

to keep God's covenant. They understood God as being all-powerful than being good. Hence, he can manifest his power by healing or inflicting people with sickness. On the other hand, Jews looked up to God for their healings, and they use this Hebrew word *rapa* (healing) frequently to manifest their understanding of God's power which reveals himself as *Rophe* (the Healer).⁶² Obedience to the commandments means living a healthy life both in mind and body, but contravening the commandments will certainly spell doom for that person. For instance, the case of Miriam turning into a leper because she spoke against God's representative (Num.12:9-16), and Gehazi the servant of Elisha was inflicted with leprosy because of his greed (2 Kings 5:26-27). This understanding raises a serious concern, why should the innocent suffer? We have the case of Job as an example of such. We will deal with the issue of suffering later in chapter three.

The Old Testament recorded many dramatic and non-dramatic experiences which serve as means of Divine Revelation. These miracles are centred on the people as a whole with few worked for some individuals. The mosaic miracles included the striking of the rock to bring forth water, the dividing of the Red Sea, and Manna in the desert. Other miraculous accounts include the following: the raising of widow's son from the dead by Elijah (1 Kings 17:17-24) and his being fed by a raven (1 Kings 17:4-6). How Elisha raised the son of the woman of Shumen (2 Kings 4:18-37) and multiplied the poor widow's jar of oil (2 Kings 4:1-7). Besides, Elisha fed hundred people with twenty barley loaves and some ears of corn at Gilgal (2 Kings 4:42-44). Furthermore, Naaman was instantly healed of leprosy (2 Kings 5:10-14), and a Syrian army was healed of blindness at Samaria (2 Kings 6:18-20). The miraculous protection of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego from fire (Dan. 3:10-27), and Daniel from the hungry lions (Dan. 6:16-23) were marvels of a sort. From the extraordinary actions in the Old Testament, one notices there are clear links between Old Testament miracles and the New Testament. The description of miracles performed by the prophets has similarity with the New Testament miracles.⁶³ The biblical and exegetical analysis of the prodigies in the Old Testament is not within our purview, and so we leave them for the biblical scholars. Finally, the purpose of Old Testament miracles according to Michael O'Neill, is to serve as a prelude to the New Testament, the coming of Jesus Christ, the Saviour, and the kingdom of God.⁶⁴

⁶² Fredrick C. Mbiere, *Healing Ministry in Nigeria* (Romae: Nonsolocopie di A Salesi, 2016), 11.

⁶³ Michael O'Neill, *Exploring the Miraculous* (Huntington: Our Sunday Visitor, 2015), 99.

⁶⁴ O'Neill, 97.

Equally, they serve as evidence to authentic the messengers of God; the prophets and the leaders of the people who performed such signs in the name of God.

1.1.2 Miracles Performed by Jesus

In the Gospels, miracles occupy a significant position not just because of their numerical strength but also for their significance in the history of salvation. They are part and parcel of the Gospels and message of salvation in action.⁶⁵ Jesus not only preached but also performed some vital signs in the course of his ministry. Many biblical scholars are of the opinion that Jesus and his followers performed miracles. Many ancient sources bear witness to the miracle-stories: Q, Mark, material peculiar to Matthew and Luke, John, Acts, the Epistles, Revelation and non-Christian testimony from both Jewish and pagan sources.⁶⁶ In the books of the New Testament, the Greek words used in describing miraculous events are as follows: ‘miraculous power’ or ‘an act of Divine power’ (*dynamis*), ‘sign’ (*semeion*), ‘prodigy’ (*téras*) or ‘miraculous deed’ (*érgon*).⁶⁷ Good enough, these words have the connotation of wonder and amazement that usually follow such miraculous events. Besides, the most interesting aspect of the whole thing is its emphasis on the meaning rather than the manner of miraculous events. “Consequently, scholars tend to agree that the predominant biblical interest is in the *meaning* rather than the *manner* of God’s mighty deeds.”⁶⁸ It is clear that the purpose of such events is of more significance than the issue of cause and effect in the biblical point of view. Therefore, the effect of the miraculous events does not stop with wonder but goes beyond that to impact meaningfully on the recipient’s life. The meaning and the purpose of such miraculous event will be manifested in the subjective response given to it by the receiver. Karl Rahner succinctly supports this position. For him, it is the purpose and not the causality that is crucial because the proper religious response does not wait to see if God has or has not bypassed the natural order.⁶⁹

New Testament miracles are signs and means of Divine Revelation. The New Testament understanding of miracles is in line with the position of the Old Testament that miracles

⁶⁵ Johann Baptist Metz, “Miracles,” in *Encyclopedia of Theology: A Concise Sacramentum Mundi*, ed. Karl Rahner (New York: St. Paul, 1975), 964.

⁶⁶ Craig S. Keener, *Miracles: the Credibility of New Testament Accounts*, 2 vols. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2012), loc. 2413 of 51259.

⁶⁷ Tanzella-Nitti, “Miracles,” II.

⁶⁸ Gwynne, *Special Divine Action*, 61.

⁶⁹ Cf. Gwynne, *Special Divine Action*, 96; Metz, “Miracles,” 963; and Schwebel, *Apparition, Healings and Weeping Madonnas*, 167. All commented on the position of Karl Rahner about the shift of focus by theologians on the study of miracles. They moved from, ‘how did it happen’ to ‘why did it happen’.

are signs and means through which God manifests himself and his power. Moreover, on a more serious note, a 'sign of Christ' that reveals his messianic mission; it announces the arrival of God's kingdom and sets people free from physical and spiritual bondage (cf. Luke 7:20-23). "The idea of a miracle as a sign is especially present in the gospel of John, who from the first chapter of his gospel traces the miracles which accompanied the Exodus of the chosen people. He then links the miracles with the discourses of Jesus, focusing to a great extent upon seven miracle-signs narrated in an ordered sequence. He starts from the transformation of water into wine at Cana (*Jn* 2:1-11), to the resurrection of Lazarus (*Jn* 11:38-44)."⁷⁰ These signs are a guarantee of Divine testimony, the Revelation of the glory of the Father in his Son, which underscore Jesus' saving work and his encounter with the power of the underworld.⁷¹ Miracles are symbols: that is special signs which manifest God's power and mercy. "Christ's miraculous deeds, His ritual actions, His sacrifice on the Calvary, and God's acceptance of that sacrifice in the Resurrection and Ascension, symbolically disclose His mission and Person."⁷² Miracles are not abstract signs from God rather actual means of personal encounter with God, who manifests himself through such events in the salvation of history. Unlike what was obtainable in the Old Testament where faith was not a prerequisite for a miracle to take place; in the New Testament trust in the person of Jesus Christ is necessary. "Jesus does not indeed consent to perform miracles merely in order to display His supernatural power, as if to overwhelm and compel the assent of others. Ordinarily speaking, some measure or degree of faith is pre-required on the part of those who ask for miracles."⁷³ This faith may be explicit or implicit, but it is necessary for a miracle to take place. While describing the miracles of Jesus Christ, the four Evangelists followed the method used in the Ancient World in describing works of wonder-workers. The method consists of three elements: first, a description of the situation, second, a simple ritual with authoritative words and sometimes gesture only, and third, demonstration of the reality of miracles or the effect of miracles on those around.⁷⁴

Miracles of Jesus, a comparative analysis of the four Gospels reveals no less than forty different accounts of miracles worked by Jesus. The number of miracles will be reduced

⁷⁰ Tanzella-Nitti, "Miracles," II.

⁷¹ Louis Monden, "Miracles of Jesus," in *Encyclopedia of Theology: A Concise Sacramentum Mundi*, ed. Karl Rahner (New York: St. Paul, 1975), 965.

⁷² Dulles, "Symbol in Revelation," 663.

⁷³ Dulles, *A History of Apologetics*, 9.

⁷⁴ Sant and Collins, "Miracle," 664.

if we are to remove all the miracles that seem to be duplicated in another Gospel's accounts. The importance of the miracle-stories in the four Gospels is in no way at all negligible. For instance, the Gospel of Mark cannot stand without the miracle-stories. It is said to have accounted for the 31 percent of the whole Gospel of Mark.⁷⁵ Similarly, Mary Valentine says that 200 of the 425 verses of Mark 1-10, deal directly or indirectly with the miracles.⁷⁶ The teachings of Jesus and his miracles are strongly fused together that one will certainly find it tough separating them. In fact, they are part of his proclamation to the people. "Preaching in Jerusalem on the Day of Pentecost, Peter described Jesus as a man attested by God with deeds of power, wonders, and signs that God did through him (Acts 2:22; Lk 24:19)."⁷⁷ Most often, Jesus used the occasion of performing miracles to teach and proclaim the good news to those around. What happens in this Gospel pericope from Luke is an example of such occasion. "Why do you raise such questions in your hearts? Which is easier, to say, 'Your sins are forgiven you,' or to say, 'Stand up and walk'? But so that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins"—he said to the one who was paralyzed—"I say to you, stand up and take your bed and go to your home" (Luke 5:22-24). This episode equally underscores the extent of healing, body and soul, which is an important fact in the healing ministry of Christ. His healing is holistic. According to Walter Kasper, "there are also, of course, significant differences between the miracles of Jesus and others reported in antiquity: Jesus does not work miracles for money, to punish, or for display."⁷⁸ There are many ways of classifying miracles of Jesus, but I will follow the method stated by Gerd Theissen, in his book, *The Miracle Stories of the Early Christian Tradition*. His methodology took cognizance of the relationship between Jesus and the recipient, as well as the purpose of the wonderful act.⁷⁹ He classified Jesus' miracles into six groups, and I am going to examine them one after the other.

Exorcism, there is evidence that Jesus performed exorcism during his lifetime here on earth. This evidence abounds in the Scriptures. In the synoptic Gospels, we find the stories of exorcisms such as the incident among the Gerasenes (cf. Matt. 8:28-34; Mark 5:1-20; Luke 8:26-39). On this pericope, one finds the issue of the epileptic child whose

⁷⁵ Tanzella-Nitti, "Miracles," II.

⁷⁶ Valentine, *Miracles*, 37.

⁷⁷ Sant and Collins, "Miracle," 663.

⁷⁸ Kasper, *Jesus the Christ*, 78.

⁷⁹ Gerd Theissen, *The Miracle Stories of the Early Christian Tradition*, trans. Francis McDonagh, ed. John Riches (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1983), 85.

case proved abortive for the disciples to handle (cf. Matt. 17:14-21; Mark 9: 14-29; Luke 9:37-43).⁸⁰ The controversy that arose after Jesus has healed the demoniac about his authority is evident that he cast out evil spirit (cf. Matt. 12:24-29). In the synoptic, Christ's exorcism and healings are seen as signs of the enthronement of God's kingdom and setting people free from the bondage of evil one. At the same time, they revealed the mystery of the Son of God. "With the coming of Christ the final age is initiated, the redemptive act of God is accomplished. In His person and work, Christ is the perfect revelation and supreme condescension of the transcendent God. It is He whom the prophets foretold (1 Pt 1.10-12)."⁸¹ In most of these exorcisms, the devils recognised Jesus as the Son of God and revealed his personality. In Mark (1:23-26), the demon shouted "have you come to destroy us? I know who you are, the Holy One of God" (1:24). Moreover, in Luke (8:28), the evil spirit says "what have you to do with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? I beg you, do not torment me." Through these encounters, the identity of Jesus was made known. When Jesus sent out his apostles, he gave them mandates, to preach the good news, heal the sick, and cast out devils (cf Matt. 10:7-8). Exorcism is part and parcel of the mandates that the apostles received from the Lord which is still effective in our age. The boundary between the exorcism and the simple healing is not vivid at all. Most sicknesses are attributed to demons. However, for this classification, exorcism here means all the cases in which attention of the wonder-worker is properly on the demons.⁸²

Healing miracles are more in number when compared with other miracle stories in the New Testament. In healing, faith plays a significant role unlike in the exorcism where the recipient is passive. It is the opinion of René Latourelle that faith has a mediating role in healing miracles than in exorcisms. "The reason for the difference is readily explained. In the case of possessed persons, who are alienated from themselves and passive, there can be no call for faith. The situation is different for the sick, who enter into a direct relationship with the person of Jesus through faith."⁸³ The healings recorded in the Gospels include an immediate recovery from a grave fever; a steady recovery of sight, hearing, and the ability to speak, the ceasing of chronic haemorrhaging (cf. Matt. 9:20-22). Furthermore, an end to an epileptic crisis; instantaneous healing of leprosy (cf. Matt.

⁸⁰ Latourelle, *The Miracles of Jesus and the Theology of Miracles*, 243.

⁸¹ Jensen, "Revelation," 189.

⁸² Latourelle, *The Miracles of Jesus and the Theology of Miracles*, 244.

⁸³ Latourelle, 245.

8:1-4; Mark 1:40-45); and recuperation of motor functions after a malformation from birth. These healings have an immediate character with the exception where additional actions are commanded. Such command like, go and wash yourself in the pool of Siloam (cf. John 9:7).⁸⁴ Miracles of Jesus are at the service of his message of the kingdom: an invitation to conversion. However, some people want the miracles only without the accompany element which is conversion.

It is interesting to note that most of Jesus' healings did provoke debate among the Pharisees and some religious leaders. They were not concerned about the reality of the healing, rather, why should it be on the Sabbath day? Sabbath is a holy day dedicated to God, and so, it is against the law to work on the Sabbath day including healing. They find it hard to accept that a person who claimed to be the Son of God would go against the law of the Sabbath which for them is sacrosanct (cf. John 9:30-33). However, Jesus did heal on the Sabbath day for the sake of love and compassion he has for the suffering humanity. In his reply, he says that Sabbath is meant for man and not man for Sabbath (cf. Mark 2:27).

Accreditation miracles, according to René Latourelle, "these miracles serve as justification for the behavior of Jesus and, at the same time, as criticism of a Pharisaic mentality that cannot see beyond the letter of juridical regulations and that would eventually bring Jesus to his death."⁸⁵ The setting of these miracles calls to question the authority of Jesus in particular by the religious leaders. They challenged his authority to heal people, especially on Sabbath day. The Sabbath healings normally end up in a controversy. The examples of accreditation miracles are the healing of a man with the withered hand (Matt.12:12-14), and the healing of a crippled woman in Luke (13:13-17). More still, are the healing of a man with dropsy (Luke 14:1-6), the healing of a leper (Mark 1:40-45). These miracles showed Jesus' love and mercy for the human beings in need. Moreover, he proved that he is the Son of God, the coming Messiah.

Miraculous gifts and rescues, in this case, the initiative is that of Christ who intervened to better the lots of the people in dire need of help.⁸⁶ They were miracles worked over the elements of nature, which have another purpose about the future mission of Christ's disciples. The miracles of the catching of fish and multiplication of loaves have something

⁸⁴ Tanzella-Nitti, "Miracles," II.

⁸⁵ Latourelle, *The Miracles of Jesus and the Theology of Miracles*, 245.

⁸⁶ Latourelle, 246.

to do with the community of believers. The former has to do with the mission of the apostles, “from now on you will be catching people” (Luke 5:10). While the latter has to do with the Eucharist, the bread from heaven, “I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty” (John 6:35). These miracles are equally visible in the turning of water into wine, two separate multiplications of loaves and a few fish, a miraculous catch of fish, calming of a storm, and walking upon water.

The stories of raising the dead, these include three resurrections of human beings who had died: the daughter of Jairus, the son of the widow of Nain, and Lazarus of Bethany. These resurrections are not the same thing as the resurrection of Christ, who will not die again. There is a debate about the proper terminology with which to explain what happens in such situation: is it re-animation, resurrection, raising from the dead, or resuscitation? Well, we leave that to the biblical scholars to sort it out themselves. All we know is that these people returned to their normal state of life and eventually died. One thing that is certain in these cases is the common idea that these people have died. Hence, Jesus bringing them back to life is unimaginable and beyond human capacity and understanding. From the Gospel of John, we understood that not all the miracles of Christ were recorded in the Bible. However, those documented were to help us believe in God (cf. John 21:24-25). Hence, miracles of Christ are not isolated signs, wonders or extraordinary events without a purpose. They have a purpose which comes to full light with the resurrection of Jesus Christ. They are signs of God’s Revelation to the humanity about the coming Messiah. These miracles attest to the Divine origin of Christ, and many come to believe in him as a result of these signs of the anticipated Messiah.⁸⁷

The greatest miracle of Jesus Christ is his resurrection. It is regarded as the miracle of all miracles. It is recorded in all the Gospels and first Corinthians (cf. 1Cor. 15; Matt. 28; Mark 16:1-8; 16:9-20; Luke 24; John 20-21), from different perspectives. According to Karl Rahner, Christ’s resurrection is not a return to life with the normal body but with a glorified body. He will not die again in this form. Therefore, “it points to the definitively saved nature of the person and of the history of a man with God. It also indicates that there is no return to our spatio-temporal biological life. He is beyond space and time.”⁸⁸ This miracle is quite different from other miracles Jesus performed because it pertains to

⁸⁷ Zsolt Aradi, *Understanding Miracles* (Manchester: Sophia Institute Press, 1956), 129.

⁸⁸ Karl Rahner and Wilhelm Thüsing, *A New Christology* (New York: Crossroad, 1980), 11.

the life of Jesus himself. His resurrection speaks to people directly because it is the answer to the meaning of everything Christians want in their lives. The other miracles do not have such effects on people; in fact, they are far more removed from us in terms of their importance and our ability to recognise them.⁸⁹ The significance of this miracle is evident as a sign and hope of our salvation in the end. Ralph McInerny summarises the issue of resurrection thus, “this conquest of death on Jesus’ part is a promise of our future condition.”⁹⁰ There are many pieces of evidence to support that he did rise from the dead. The empty tomb is an indication that he has arisen, and his appearances to the people as recorded in the Bible.

What can contemporary Catholic theologians say about Jesus’ understanding of his miraculous activities? How does he understand them as a person or what they stand for him? To answer this question; they turn to the Scripture. For Jesus, miracles are the work of the Father who sent him and his work as well. “So it is the father who through these works manifests Christ as his Son and reveals himself as God the Saviour.”⁹¹ Similarly, the Gospel of John has it that the works of Jesus are that of the Father as well. Thus he says, “the works that the Father has given me to complete, the very works that I am doing, testify on my behalf that the Father has sent me” (Joh 5:36). According to Mary Valentine, “obviously Jesus wants the works to point to the Father, revelations intimately connected with salvation.”⁹² In the Gospel of Matthew, he says, “but if it is by the Spirit of God that I cast out demons, then the kingdom of God has come to you” (Matt.12:28). According to Luke’s Gospel, it goes like this, “but if it is by the finger of God that I cast out the demons, then the kingdom of God has come to you” (Luke 11:20). This pericope was from the scene where the Pharisees accused him of casting out demons by the power of Beelzebul, the prince of demons. The activity of Jesus as an exorcist is in line with the messianic *Kairos*, the destruction of the kingdom of the evil one. The kingdom of God has been initiated with the expulsion of the evil one. He does this by no other power than his own that is why he uses the pronoun, I, by so doing connects his work with the coming kingdom of God.⁹³ Similarly, the ‘I’ sayings, are evident in the healing of the leper (cf. Mark 1:40- 42), in the healing of the paralytic who was led down through the roof (cf. Mark 2:1-12), in the raising of Jairus daughter from the dead (cf. Mark 5:41-42), and

⁸⁹ Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith*, 264.

⁹⁰ McInerny, *Miracles a Catholic View*, 58.

⁹¹ Monden, “Miracles of Jesus,” 965.

⁹² Valentine, *Miracles*, 45.

⁹³ Latourelle, *The Miracles of Jesus and the Theology of Miracles*, 42.

many more. His actions reveal his identity: the Messiah and the Son of God. Expulsion of the evil one is one of the characteristics of the coming Messiah prophesized by Isaiah (cf. 35:5-6).

Furthermore, Jesus showed what his great works stood for when he rebuked the three towns that failed to grasp the in-breaking of the kingdom of God in their midst through his mighty deeds (cf. Matt.11:20-24; Luke 10:13-15). According to René Latourelle, “Chorazin, Bethsaida, and Capernaum are privileged towns, being the first to witness and benefit from the activity of Jesus. Yet they have not recognized the works of Jesus as “signs” of the kingdom. They have not welcomed the decisive season of conversion and salvation. Their fate will be worse, therefore, than that of towns traditionally regarded as wicked (Tyre and Sidon) and sinful (Sodom).”⁹⁴ The meaning of his miracles is presented here as a call to repentance and conversion, which these three towns were found wanting. He did this by appealing to human sensitivity and not by coercion.

More still, Jesus’ reply to John the Baptist’s query showed what his mighty works stood to achieve. “Are you the one who is to come, or are we to wait for another?” Jesus answered them, “Go and tell John what you hear and see: the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the poor have good news brought to them. And blessed is anyone who takes no offense at me” (Matt. 11:3-6). Jesus answered the question here by pointing at the work he has done. The mighty works he did stand to identify him as the expected Messiah. Hence, Jesus brings to reality the coming reign of God through his miracles. He did not perform wonders for the fun of it. “His miracles are never prodigies for their own sake but are calls to conversion and repentance as indispensable conditions for entering the kingdom. The miracles are *signs* and at the same time *works* of Christ.”⁹⁵

In the Gospels, there are some negative and positive characteristics which make miracles unacceptable or acceptable to people. Any miracle with these negative features must be rejected as pseudo-miracles. René Latourelle highlighted these negative attitudes visible in the Gospels when he said, “authentic miracles do not aim at a facile, personal victory; they are not feats intended to satisfy popular curiosity; they are incompatible with pride,

⁹⁴ Latourelle, 43.

⁹⁵ Latourelle, 52.

a lack of faith, or hardness of heart. They are gifts of God aimed at conversation and signs of the kingdom that is present in Jesus.”⁹⁶

On the contrary, miracles of Jesus Christ according to René Latourelle, have these positive features: 1. A miracle has for its purpose the salvation of the whole person: heart and body alike. 2. A miracle is a call to discipleship. For example, the man he healed at Gerasenes (cf. Mark 5:1-20). 3. The function of miracles is to reveal and accredit and also to liberate people and fulfil their desire for salvation. 4. A miracle deepens a relationship between the recipient and Jesus Christ. 5. The recipient is expected to show total trust in the power of Jesus. 6. Another specific characteristic of the miracles of Jesus is their ecclesial nature. 7. The miracles of Jesus are means of Divine Revelation.⁹⁷ Furthermore, miracles of Jesus are for good with the intention of furthering the aims of the kingdom of God. Anything that has an inkling of peril should be approached with caution. “The praeter natural works of Jesus were almost without exception beneficent deeds—to alleviate human misery or to further the interests of the kingdom. They were not arbitrary interferences with the course of nature, a show of divine might without reference to the needs of the situation or the saving character of Christ’s mission.”⁹⁸

Finally, there is an indication in the contemporary theology of miracle that some of Jesus’ miracle narratives are post-resurrection reading of the events. In other words, the meaning of the miraculous events was conditioned by the resurrection of Christ as it were. Giuseppe Tanzella-Nitti calls our attention to that when he says, “contemporary exegesis cannot ignore the possibility that some accounts of miracles are possibly ‘post-Paschal re-readings’ of the divinity of Jesus Christ, the full awareness of which the disciples reached only after the Resurrection.”⁹⁹ Certainly, the significance of the resurrection of Jesus Christ cannot be overemphasised. It enlightened the knowledge of the apostles and brought out the inner meaning of the works of Jesus. The resurrection of Christ is the basis for the Apostolic and the Church’s proclamation. Resurrection is the watershed in the Church’s understanding of Jesus and his ministry. The subsequent miracles performed by the apostle and post-biblical miracles were possible with the faith in the Risen Christ. This faith leads us to accept the authenticity of miracles, as well as to see the salvific meaning therein and be challenged by the Revelation. Avery Dulles supports this idea

⁹⁶ Latourelle, 258.

⁹⁷ Latourelle, 258-261.

⁹⁸ Aradi, *Understanding Miracles*, 135.

⁹⁹ Tanzella-Nitti, “Miracles,” II.

when he says, “in these gospels faith comes up most frequently in connection with the stories of healings and other miraculous events. Faith, however, is seen not only as a result of miracles but also, and perhaps predominantly, as a force that brings them about.”¹⁰⁰ The miraculous sign is quite different from prodigies demanded by Jews, which have no meaning except being amazing.

1.1.3 Miracles performed by Apostles

The ecclesiastical nature of miracles is evident in the Scriptures. The mission mandates to the apostles brought it out clearly; go into the world proclaim the good news, heal the sick, and cast out demons. The apostles certainly continued with the mission after the ascension of Christ. The idea that apostles performed some miracles is in line with the pre-resurrection mandates which were renewed by Jesus Christ before his ascension. In his name, they will lay their hands on the sick persons and cured them.¹⁰¹ They did that by the power of Christ. The stories of these miraculous events are in the Acts of the Apostles and Epistles. For instance, the case of the lame man healed by Peter at the gate of the temple. “I have no silver or gold, but what I have I give you; in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, stand up and walk” (Acts 3:6). Commenting on the above incident, Pope John Paul II says, “however, these ‘wonders and signs’ which accompanied the beginnings of the apostolic Church were done by the apostles not in their own name, but in the name of Jesus Christ, and were therefore a further proof of his divine power.”¹⁰² Equally, Peter raised a woman called Tabitha from death (cf. Acts 9:40); and was delivered from the prison miraculously himself. On the side of Paul, he cured many people, and one striking instance is the raising of Eutychus from death (cf. Acts 20:12). It is written in the Bible that even their shadows and garments have healing powers. “In Ephesus for example, Paul is seen to have a uniquely powerful ministry, so the sweat bands that had been tied round his head, and aprons tied round his waist were carried to the sick and to those with evil spirits and they were all cured.”¹⁰³ In fact, there are many other miracles performed by the apostles in which the details are lacking in the Bible (Acts 6:8; 19:11).

¹⁰⁰ Dulles, *The Assurance of Things Hoped For*, 10.

¹⁰¹ Mbiere, *Healing Ministry in Nigeria*, 17.

¹⁰² John Paul II, “I Say to You Arise! General Audience,” in *Interdisciplinary Encyclopedia of Science and Religion*, (November 18, 1987), accessed April 30, 2017, <http://inters.org/John-Paul-II-Catechesis-Miracles-Arise>.

¹⁰³ Mbiere *Healing Ministry in Nigeria*, 18.

As regards the understanding of the miracles performed by apostles, they gave credence to their mission and authority. “The point of the miracles performed by the Apostles is to establish their authority and to serve as proof of the message they bring. They do not do these things in their own name, but by invoking the power of Jesus” (Acts 19:11-12 added by me).¹⁰⁴ It is interesting to note that Paul grouped miracles and healing as the gifts of the Spirit for the well-being of the community, and not for the individual per se. Therefore, they should be used in accordance with the intention of the giver (cf. 1Cor. 12). Miracles did not end with the Apostles but continue in different forms and shapes till date. The power to work prodigies is a promise made to the Church by Jesus Christ; those who believe in him will cast out the devil and cure the sick as a sign of their commission (cf. Mark 16:17-18, Matt.10:7-8). Similarly, the Epistle of James gave direction on how to treat those who are sick among the believers. They should call the elders of the Church to pray over them and anoint them with oil for healing and forgiveness (cf. James 5:14-16). Mary Valentine underscores “that mercy is the basis for all of the apostolic miracles which occur throughout the *Acts*, and which, while causing wonder and frequently led to non-believers joining the early church, they are accepted as an almost natural fulfilment of Jesus’ mission to his apostles.”¹⁰⁵ The role played by apostles as healers had a serious impression on the people of that period, and so helped them to accept the Gospel. John Okoye is of the opinion that the first Christians were perfectly aware that the miraculous power of the apostles was not magic. Moreover, it did not give them the power to put God under their control; rather it is at the discretion of God to dispense as he wills wherever and whenever.¹⁰⁶ God is indeed in control of all the authentic miracles and miracle workers.

By and large, miracles from biblical perspective reflect three dominant aspects: psychological, ontological, and semiological.¹⁰⁷ They summarise people’s understanding and attitude to any marvellous work as the Bible presents them. First, psychological aspect brings out a sense of marvel, astonishment, amazement, and wonder in people with their encounter with an extraordinary reality. At the first instance, people are bewildered about what they have seen. With proper discernment, people get to know the cause of such a marvellous work. Second, *erga* and *dynameis* reveal the ontological side of a

¹⁰⁴ McInerney, *Miracles a Catholic View*, 62.

¹⁰⁵ Valentine, *Miracles*, 79-80.

¹⁰⁶ John I. Okoye, *Biblical and Pastoral Reflection on the Catholic Charismatic Renewal* (Enugu: Snaap, 2000), 23.

¹⁰⁷ Latourelle, *The Miracles of Jesus and the Theology of Miracles*, 263.

miracle. The two terms manifest the Divine power in such a great deed which is beyond the normal capacity of people. In fact, they point to transcendental being as the source of the marvel. It is then that people will begin to enquire into the purpose and meaning of the miraculous deed. Third, semiological aspect, the Greek word '*semeion*' which means 'sign' is used to describe miracle. A miracle is a marvellous deed from God as a message for humanity. It is a sign revealing something to individuals about Divine plans. "These three aspects—the psychological (miracles as wonders), factual, physical, or ontological (miracles as works, acts of power), and noetic, intentional semiological (miracles as signs)—can be seen brought together in the discourse of Peter on Pentecost. In this discourse he uses three complementary terms in describing the miracles of Jesus: 'Mighty works (*dynameis*) and wonders (*terata*) and signs (*sēmeia*) which God did through him in your midst' (Acts 2:22)."¹⁰⁸

According to René Latourelle, the approach to the Catholic theology of miracles has shifted from the miracles as signs of power to miracles as signs of love in this contemporary period.¹⁰⁹ The situation of the Old Testament brings out the notion of the power of God who creates and sustains the world through his power. The Jewish people have this idea that the coming Messiah is the one with almighty power, just as they witnessed in their journey from Egypt. They would find it hard to accept the Messiah that lacks such power as has been revealed in their past leaders. Nevertheless, overemphasis on the power of God as if it were his only attribute will be a wrong approach to any theology, because he has other attributes. Hence, it is through his teachings and actions that Jesus gradually reveals God's love to the people of Israel. "His miracles are therefore works of power, but in the service of love; they are always works of the Almighty who exorcises, heals, and raises to life, but out of love."¹¹⁰ He uses his power in the performance of miraculous events in love to connect with the Jewish idea of the coming Messiah and fulfils it.

1.2 General Theological Concept of Miracles

Worthy of note is the knowledge that miracles are not only in the Scripture but also in the Church tradition and magisterial teachings. The conciliar fathers of the Second Vatican Council stated the role of sacred tradition and magisterium beautifully in *Dei Verbum*,

¹⁰⁸ Latourelle, 265.

¹⁰⁹ Latourelle, 21.

¹¹⁰ Latourelle, 21-22.

Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation. “It is clear, therefore, that sacred tradition, Sacred Scripture and the teaching authority of the Church, in accord with God’s most wise design, are so linked and joined together that one cannot stand without the others, and that all together and each in its own way under the action of the one Holy Spirit contribute effectively to the salvation of souls.”¹¹¹ Here I am going to consider some understandings of miracles in recent times which underscore their purpose and functions. These understandings will help us to examine the trend of thoughts in the contemporary Catholic theology of miracles.

Miracles are signs pointing to something beyond themselves, and sometimes pointing to themselves and intrinsic meaning of their existence like the case of Jesus Christ. He is a sign and the reality of that he is pointing. Miracles by their very nature are signs, which affect people’s existence since they bear on each one’s future and one’s salvation which one seeks as an interested party.¹¹² The sign aspect of miracles certainly gives credence to the revelatory quality of the miraculous events. There is something new the sign is bringing to our knowledge which *ab initio* is unknown to us. Miracles are only possible within the context of faith, and that elucidates the meaning of the sign and the extraordinary nature of the miraculous event in question. The proper content of faith is the acceptance of God’s saving acts through Christ and in Christ. The saving act of God reached its climax in the paschal mystery, passion, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. The resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ is the ‘miracle’ of all miracles. Furthermore, “miraculous events are meaningful and credible insofar as they are visible analogues of God’s gracious condescension and refer the mind to God’s saving intentions.”¹¹³ There is an inner urge in people to search for the transcendence which some may deny. However, the denial does not remove the desire to be united with the Supreme Being. Miracles somehow provide people with opportunities to be united with the Supreme Being and be satisfied to some extent. In this context, miracles are not mere signs to frighten or to amuse people, rather signs that draw people into the central mystery of Christianity. In the words of Ralph McInerny, “miracles are not meant to amuse or divert or to frighten or titillate. No marvelous occurrence that does not draw our attention to the central mysteries of Christianity, to the saving work of Jesus Christ, is going to be thought of as a miracle. The miracle will always be a sign of God’s presence and an opportunity for

¹¹¹ DV, 10.

¹¹² Metz, “Miracles,” 963.

¹¹³ Dulles, *The Assurance of Things Hoped For*, 108.

men to respond to the divine call.”¹¹⁴ The description aptly serves as a differentiating mark for miracles and other wonderful occurrences that have nothing to do with our salvation. Other people may see it from another angle or give it a different interpretation, but whoever that believes in the existence of God would certainly see the handiwork of God in it. This understanding should not be construed as fideism. “Miracles can be seen as religious signs because they announce the good news for which our hearts are restless.”¹¹⁵ Equally, this assertion underscores the religious context of the miraculous signs.

Miracles neither oppose the nature nor violate it; rather they are superior to nature. According to John Paul II, “miracles are not opposed to the forces and laws of nature. They merely imply a certain empirical suspension of their ordinary function and not their annulment.”¹¹⁶ The power of God accentuates the potential of nature and exalts it. It is a clear manifestation of what happens when superior force encounters less force. It will actualise the potency of the less force without doing any damage to it. God’s power is greater than that of nature and will actualise the potential in nature without violating it; rather it will surpass it. The question that comes to mind immediately is the issue of non-corporeal beings transcending the nature. Non-corporeal beings have the ability to do what people cannot do. So, they perform some extraordinary actions from the human point of view. Their acts are natural to them but extraordinary to people. The non-corporeal beings may be benevolent or malevolent and how to differentiate who is who is a problem. The intention of the extraordinary event settles the problem. The malevolent non-corporeal being will undoubtedly lead people away from Christ Jesus, while benevolent will direct us to him.

Catholic Church is clear about her position concerning the miracles in the Sacred Scripture from the time immemorial. Catholic Church teaches that God reveals himself to people through the natural things around the world, but in a special way, God reveals himself to us through our first parents, prophets and in a definitive way in and through Jesus Christ.¹¹⁷ According to the Church, miracles in the Sacred Scripture and most especially the resurrection support and authenticate Divine Revelation. “To see Jesus is

¹¹⁴ McInerney, *Miracles a Catholic View*, 14.

¹¹⁵ Dulles, *The Assurance of Things Hoped For*, 108.

¹¹⁶ John Paul II, “Miracles Manifest the Supernatural Order, General Audience,” in *Interdisciplinary Encyclopedia of Science and Religion*, (November 18, 1987), accessed April 30, 2017, <http://inters.org/John-Paul-II-Catechesis-Miracles-Order>.

¹¹⁷ DV, 4.

to see His Father (John 14:9). For this reason Jesus perfected revelation by fulfilling it through his whole work of making Himself present and manifesting Himself: through His words and deeds, His signs and wonders, but especially through His death and glorious resurrection from the dead and final sending of the Spirit of truth.”¹¹⁸ This statement is not a definition of miracles by the Church but a functional description of miracles.

There is no official definition of the term ‘miracles’ by the Church as it stands now. From the statement of the *Dei Verbum*, we can deduce the revelatory and the authenticating functions of miracles. Hence, miracles are means and part and parcel of Divine Revelation, and at the same time confirm what it reveals. An attentive reading of some Church documents reveals the following: first, in the *Dei Verbum*, Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation, the council fathers did not see miracles as external proofs of Revelation only but considered them as a constituent part of the Revelation.¹¹⁹ The confirmative function of miracles is stated in number four of the same document. “For this reason Jesus perfected revelation by fulfilling it through his whole work of making Himself present and manifesting Himself: through His words and deeds, His signs and wonders, but especially through His death and glorious resurrection from the dead and final sending of the Spirit of truth.”¹²⁰ Second, *Lumen Gentium*, the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, acknowledges that “the Miracles of Jesus also confirm that the Kingdom has already arrived on earth.”¹²¹ Third, *Dignitatis Humanae*, the Declaration on Religious Liberty, states that Christ “wrought miracles to illuminate His teaching and to establish its truth, but His intention was to rouse faith in His hearers and to confirm them in faith, not to exert coercion upon them.”¹²² In a nutshell, the Church presents the way and manner with which to approach the issue of miracles in these documents.

The teaching of the Church distinguishes between public and private Revelations, as regards miracles being means and content of Divine Revelation. The two differ in degree and essence. All the miracles after the death of the last apostle, John, are regarded as

¹¹⁸ DV.

¹¹⁹ DV, 2.

¹²⁰ DV, 4.

¹²¹ Second Vatican Council, “*Lumen Gentium*, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church,” (hereafter LG), (November 21, 1964), no. 5,

http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19641121_lumen-gentium_en.html.

¹²² Second Vatican Council, “*Dignitatis Humanae*, Declaration on Religious Liberty,” (hereafter DH), (December 7, 1965), no. 11,

http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_decl_19651207_dignitatis-humanae_en.html.

private Revelation. “Public Revelation” refers to the revealing action of God directed to humanity as a whole and which finds its literary expression in the two parts of the Bible: the Old and New Testaments.”¹²³ Miracles are part of the revealing actions of God.

Private Revelations are not an article of faith, even when approved by the Church. One is not obliged to accept it. It is a matter of choice and devotion.¹²⁴ Concomitantly, Benedict XVI in his apostolic exhortation, *Verbum Domini*, speaks of the role of private Revelations in our Christian lives. “The value of private revelations is essentially different from that of the one public revelation: the latter demands faith; in it God himself speaks to us through human words and the mediation of the living community of the Church.... Private revelation is an aid to this faith, and it demonstrates its credibility precisely because it refers back to the one public revelation.”¹²⁵ On the other hand, the miracles recorded in the Sacred Scriptures are considered as public Revelation which is valid all the time. “The term ‘public Revelation’ refers to the revealing action of God directed to humanity as a whole and which finds its literary expression in the two parts of the Bible: the Old and New Testaments... It is valid for all time, and it has reached its fulfilment in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.”¹²⁶ They are part and parcel of the Catholic faith. In other words, they are articles of our faith, and we have incarnation and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ vividly enshrined in the Catholic creed, as it were. Michael O’Neil underscores the seriousness with which the Church treats the issue of miracles in the Bible before Second Vatican Council when he quoted First Vatican Council. It says, “if anyone shall say that miracles are impossible, and therefore that all the accounts regarding them, even those contained in Holy Scripture, are to be dismissed as fables or myths; or that miracles can never be known with certainty, and that the divine origin of Christianity cannot be proved by them; let him be anathema.”¹²⁷

¹²³ Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, “The Message of Fatima,” (May 13, 2000), Public Revelation and Private Revelations, http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_20000626_message-fatima_en.html.

¹²⁴ Francis Cardinal Arinze, “Apparitions, Visions, Locutions, and Cardinal Arinze,” YouTube Video, 6.15, posted by True Faith TV, accessed May 10, 2017, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=29f69elBzvs>.

¹²⁵ Benedict XVI, “*Verbum Domini*, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation on the Word of God in the Life and Mission of the Church,” (September 30, 2010), no. 14, http://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_ben-xvi_exh_20100930_verbum-domini.html.

¹²⁶ Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, “The Message of Fatima.”

¹²⁷ O’Neill, *Exploring the Miraculous*, 22.

The Church without any equivocation is carrying out the task of transmitting, preaching, and preserving the word of God faithfully which is a duty proper to her.¹²⁸ Significantly, miraculous events in the Scripture which are part of Revelation of God's plan of salvation cannot be an exception. Historical events such as miracles when approached from the perspective of faith become revelatory. Miracles not only serve as means of God's Revelation but also as signs of Divine Revelation. The impact of miracles as revelatory events is understood on the personal level, and it varies depending on the context and the disposition of the recipient. However, René Laurentin reiterated against the assumption that all miracles are purely subjective experience instead they are both subjective and objective encounter. Moreover, he says, "all communication has a subjective dimension in so far as it is the act of a subject, but it is also objective, to the degree to which it puts us in touch with the object."¹²⁹ Hence, miracles may lead a person to believe in God and accept Divine Revelation as a real and symbolic event.¹³⁰ To clarify the meaning of miracles all the more let us consider some definitions of miracles.

First, Johann Baptist Metz in his definition of miracles highlights their sign function in line with the scriptural meaning. "From the theological point of view, miracles are authenticating signs. They display the promised lordship of God as actually and effectively present. They accredit the historical figures through whom these promises come true: the patriarchs, the prophets, and Jesus Christ."¹³¹ Furthermore, he states that they are not exhibitions of God's power to amuse people. They are intentional signs which tend to achieve a particular purpose in the life of the recipient.

Second, Giuseppe Tanzella-Nitti considers the revelatory character of miracles in his definition. According to him, miracle "is an event of divine revelation perceived by a human subject, within his/her religious relationship with God, as an extraordinary and wonderful sign of God's merciful and saving presence in his might and love; an event in which God manifests his presence as a Creator freely exerting his causal action from nil and on nature."¹³² From this definition, one thing is clear, that miracles deal with the issue of communication between God and humanity. That is why it is not possible to accept the occurrence of miracles under any circumstance. Miracles are acceptable in a

¹²⁸ DV, 10.

¹²⁹ René Laurentin, *The Apparitions of the Blessed Virgin Mary Today*, 2nd ed., trans. Luke Griffin (Dublin: Veritas, 1991), 35.

¹³⁰ Paniker, *Revelation and Faith*, 54.

¹³¹ Metz, "Miracles," 963-964.

¹³² Tanzella-Nitti, "Miracles," VI.

religious context only. An extraordinary event that has no connection with divinity and humanity is not, and should not be seen as a miraculous event. Certainly, whatever may have occurred might be any other thing other than a miracle which is a communication of a sort.

Third, Ralph McInerny on his part says that miracle “is a wonderful occurrence essentially linked to the truths of faith. The purpose of miracles is to direct the mind to the good news of Jesus: in that it differs from all kinds of other marvels and wonders, real and natural, as well as from the performances of magicians.”¹³³ One can establish from the above statement the intentional aspect of miracles. In other words, miracles point beyond the wonders which are readily seen.

Fourth, the definition of miracle which accommodates all the three aspects of a miracle psychological, ontological, and semiological could be deduced from the Scripture and tradition of the Church as René Latourelle tries to do. For him, the three aspects of miracle are represented by the three words used in the Church document on Divine Revelation, *Dei Verbum*: work, signs, and miracles.¹³⁴ He derived this definition from the Scriptures, tradition, and magisterium. “A miracle is a religious wonder that expresses, in the cosmic order (human beings and the universe), a special and utterly free intervention of the God of power and love, who thereby gives human beings a sign of the uninterrupted presence of his word of salvation in the world.”¹³⁵

A little analysis of this definition will help to understand the meaning of the information put across here. Four things need to be elucidated: a wonder in the cosmic order, a religious or sacred wonder, a special, utterly free intervention of the God of power and love, and Divine sign. First, wonder in the cosmic order, a miracle is an event in the sensible world that we have observed the reality of it. Albeit, it beats our imagination as regards the regularity of events in the world. The unusual nature of the event will certainly lead us into asking questions. For instance, the reaction of the people at the healing of the man born blind. “Never since the world began has it been heard that anyone opened the eyes of a person born blind” (John 9:32). There are other extraordinary events which may not be qualified to be called miracles like hypostatic union and transubstantiation because

¹³³ McInerny, *Miracles a Catholic View*, 22.

¹³⁴ Latourelle, *The Miracles of Jesus and the Theology of Miracles*, 276.

¹³⁵ Latourelle, 276.

they are not perceptible. They are mysteries rather than miracles.¹³⁶ The explanation here aptly points to the psychological aspect of miracle in which the recipient is thrilled by the unusual event.

Second, a religious or sacred wonder, miracles are possible under religious context as mentioned before. This wonder is meaningful only in connection with the Divine. There must be a link between the event, God, and recipient who believes in the omnipotence of God. It is in this context that magic, legends, myths and others differ from miracles. The link may serve as an answer to the petition made to God, or as a sign of holiness of life, and, as a way of confirming the messenger and divinity of the message. All we have mentioned are kinds of communication between persons in a relationship. Perhaps, communication between God and humanity. “If God is behind a miracle, and we can agree that that is ultimately what makes a miracle a miracle, then a large part of his performing the miracle has to do with communicating with people who are observing or experiencing the miracle.”¹³⁷ This notion of communication underscores the history of our economy of salvation which Christ-event manifests and represents definitively. Any miracle that has no link to what Christ represents can as well be something else other than a miracle. On the other hand, any miracle that lacks the character of communication cannot be a miracle. A miracle cannot happen in the absence of the recipient or recipients because it lacks the character of communication. Nevertheless, God in communicating himself does not lose his infinite nature neither do human beings lose their finite nature to be infinite. God is still an immanent and transcendental being in his communication with humanity. We got to know him through this Revelation, but could not assume that we have grasped the whole mystery of God. “Divine self-communication means, then, that God can communicate himself in his own reality to what is not divine without ceasing to be infinite reality and absolute mystery, and without man ceasing to be a finite existent different from God.”¹³⁸ People cannot subject God to their whims and caprices such that they will be able to manipulate him.

Third, a special, utterly free intervention of the God of power and love, this stresses the ontological aspect of a miracle, and so account for the source of the amazement experienced. In this context, miracles should be construed as the work of the power and

¹³⁶ Latourelle, 276.

¹³⁷ Eric Metaxas, *Miracles* (New York: Dutton, 2014), 15.

¹³⁸ Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith*, 119.

love of God, which transcend the natural order. 'Transcend' in the sense of physical laws being subordinate to God's power instead of violating it. He does this freely out of his love for people. However, some scientists and philosophers may have some reservation in accepting this explanation. René Latourelle considers this aspect of a miracle necessary and includes it in his definition. "If I add in my definition that the God who intervenes is the God of power and love, my intention is to emphasize that a miracle is not purely a show of power but an action in which God puts his *Dynamis* in the service of his *Agape*: a miracle is a joint work of the Father and the Son and has its source in their mutual love."¹³⁹ Miracles reveal the existence of the Supernatural Being in whom people place their trust. "These miracles demonstrate the existence of the supernatural order, which is the object of faith. Those who observed them and particularly those who experienced them were made aware as if by the touch of a hand that the natural order does not exhaust the whole of reality."¹⁴⁰ This statements lay bare the notion that reality is beyond the visible world.

Fourth, a Divine sign, the semiological or intentional aspect of a miracle is vital for its understanding. The Greek word for miracle is '*semeion*' which entails a sign. It is the sign aspect of a miracle that directs us to the message of the event. When the Divine sign in the miraculous event is apprehended, the intention and purpose of such a marvel come to fruition. People believe that God is the source of the sign and his message is for salvation. This sign is more of subjective than objective which addresses an individual personally and elicits some response from the person.¹⁴¹ People understand a miraculous event better when they cooperate with the grace of God. For Karl Rahner, "a miracle in the New Testament is a *semeion*, a sign, that is, the manifestation of God's salvific activity in grace and revelation. The "sign" is an intrinsic element in the salvific act itself and belongs to this salvific act of God. It is its manifestation in historical tangibility, the outermost layer as it were in which the revelatory and salvific act of God reaches into the dimension of our corporeal experience."¹⁴² Miracle as a sign is polyvalent. In other words, it has different dimensions of manifestation of the same reality. Just like in the Scripture, miracles of Christ are archetypes of every other true miracle. All the miracles in the life

¹³⁹ Latourelle, *The Miracles of Jesus and the Theology of Miracles*, 280.

¹⁴⁰ John Paul II, "Miracles Manifest the Supernatural Order."

¹⁴¹ Latourelle, *The Miracles of Jesus and the Theology of Miracles*, 280.

¹⁴² Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith*, 258.

of the Church take a clue from that.¹⁴³ René Latourelle tried and unified all the three aspects of miracles with each taking its appropriate position in his definition.

The emphasis on the semiological aspect of miracles differs from what we are used to before Second Vatican Council. The *Dei Verbum*, Dogmatic Constitution on the Divine Revelation, marks the clear departure from the increasing emphasis on the intentional understanding of miracles. However, this does not mean that ontological and psychological aspects have been jettisoned, no, they are incorporated into the definition with less emphasis. This shift is a return to the original notion of miracles as it is in the Scriptures, sign-events. Miracles as sign-events are revelatory in the sense that they bring to man's consciousness God's plan of salvation. "As a sign accomplished for man's sake, a miracle is a *revelatory event*: first of all, as a significant message for man regarding his own salvation; and secondly, as revealing something about created nature."¹⁴⁴ Miracle is a revelatory event which symbolically calls the recipient into a relationship or dialogue as the case may be. Moreover, Avery Dulles says, "God by his symbolic action manifests himself as revealer; he summons human beings to be attentive and responsive; and he gives them ideas and insights that they would otherwise lack."¹⁴⁵

It is a known fact that Jesus performed miracles. Nevertheless, he frowns at those who search for miracles instead of God. He says, "an evil and adulterous generation asks for a sign, but no sign will be given to it except the sign of Jonah" (Matt.16:4). Hans Küng stresses that Jesus refusal to perform a sign to authenticate his message does not mean rejection of miracles. Rather, he is against the inordinate quest for a sign: "He refuses a sign, not to suggest that miracles are impossible, but because they are misleading. He does not reject belief in miracles, but the demand and the craving for miracles; not miracles as such, but spectacular miracles."¹⁴⁶ The inordinate desire for a sign is one of the banes of Christianity especially in Africa and other developing countries in recent times. People want a sign before they can believe in God. Moreover, sometimes they want a sign for its sake without conversion. This attitude contradicts Edward Denis' understanding of miracles in the Gospels as a call to faith and conversion. "In the gospel tradition, the miracles of Jesus function as signs and mediations of the coming reign of

¹⁴³ Latourelle, *The Theology of Revelation*, 389.

¹⁴⁴ Tanzella-Nitti, "Miracles," VI.

¹⁴⁵ Dulles, *Craft of Theology: from Symbol to System*, 23.

¹⁴⁶ Hans Küng, *On Being*, trans. E. Quinn, (London: Baker Books, 1977), 228, quoted in Paul Gywnne, *Special Divine Action: Key Issues in the Contemporary Debate, 1965-1995* (Roma: Editrice Pontificia Universita Gregoriana, 1996), 98.

God. They are presented not as the reports of detached observers, but as the testimony of believers. They are of their very nature signs, signs that bear on salvation. They are signs that summon a person to conversion and commitment to the way of the reign of God.”¹⁴⁷

1.3 Different Meanings of Miracles as Divine Signs

Miracles are signs and means of Divine Revelation which are mediated through a tangible experience in the world. This tangible experience is symbolic in the sense that it suggests more than one sees at that particular moment. Christ is the sign that reveals God to us and at the same time God among us.¹⁴⁸ Hence, for contemporary Catholic theology, miracles are revelatory symbols which mediate God’s self-communication.¹⁴⁹ John in his Gospel used a sign and symbolic languages in describing miracles of Jesus more than the synoptic Gospels. A symbol is a special type of sign that has the power to go beyond what is and evokes more meaning. “Symbol is a sign pregnant with a depth of meaning which is evoked rather than explicitly stated.”¹⁵⁰ In the Old and New Testaments, we have some symbolic signs such as healings, multiplication of bread, turning water into wine, and resurrection. These events took place in the sensible world of reality. These signs have the capacity of changing our values and strengthening our commitment to the values we have accepted. Through these signs, one gets to another level of awareness which is not accessible to the person under normal circumstances.

Miracles being symbolic signs are transformative, in the sense that our values and point of views are not always the same after our experience of a miraculous event. Miracles with their symbolic quality lead to an inner meaning of the sign-event and transform our relationship with God. The proper interpretation of the miraculous event by someone who is religiously inclined leads to grasping of God’s plan of salvation through Christ. Miracles as symbolic signs are evocative with multivalent signs acting in different directions at once. “Because of the role of creation and history, a miraculous event in itself can have many interpretations. This polyvalence is also the scope of faith’s freedom of choice. A miracle can only be seen as the act of God by faith. It does not force faith, but challenges it and makes it credible.”¹⁵¹ Hence, our use of ‘sign’ here should be properly understood to be a symbolic sign and not otherwise. In the New Testament, a

¹⁴⁷ Edwards, *How God Acts*, 87.

¹⁴⁸ Latourelle, *The Miracles of Jesus and the Theology of Miracles*, 15.

¹⁴⁹ Avery Dulles, “Symbolic Structure of Revelation,” *Theological Studies* 41, no. 1 (March 1, 1980): 56, <https://doi.org/10.1177/004056398004100102>.

¹⁵⁰ Dulles, *Symbolic Structure of Revelation*, 57.

¹⁵¹ Kasper, *Jesus the Christ*, 83.

miracle is a sign of God's faithfulness and his salvific plan for humanity through Christ, his Son. As a sign, Christ embodies everything God is and wants to accomplish for the sake of his people. "In a miracle it is the shock and the qualitative leap produced by the event that direct the mind toward the superabundant meaning and reality that dwell in Jesus."¹⁵² Miracles are revelatory events that manifest; signs of the power of God, signs of the love of God, and signs of the coming of the kingdom of God. Besides, miracles entail signs of a Divine mission, signs of the glory of Christ, signs of Revelation of the Trinitarian mystery, symbols of the sacramental economy, signs of the transformation of the passing world, and signs of faith. All these aspects of miracles as signs are present in the contemporary Catholic theology.

1.3.1 Miracles as Signs of the Power of God

By mere mention of miracles, one is directly or indirectly talking about the power of a being who has the capacity of doing what other beings cannot do. Moreover, here we are talking about Almighty God who can perform such signs. Miracles are the manifestation of God and his eternal plan for the people in Christ. These signs are evident in the mighty deeds carried out by Christ as 'recorded' in the Gospels. John Paul II has this to say about miracles, "by means of the 'mighty deeds, wonders and signs' which he performed, Jesus Christ manifested his power to save the human race from the evil which threatens the immortal soul and the vocation to union with God."¹⁵³ It is not just healing of the mortal body that will certainly die one day, but beyond that to the healing of our immortal souls. The limitation of his power is his acceptance to die for us out of love on the cross. Here he manifested his saving power in weakness by dying to conquer death and the author of death. It is a paradox.

Mark's Gospel presents miracles in a manner that depicts the *dynameis* (power) of Christ which is capable of transforming the whole of humanity. René Latourelle describes a miracles as "power capable of transforming the entire human person, body and soul, and dismantling the kingdom of Satan in order to establish the reign of God."¹⁵⁴ An instance of this is the healing of the paralytic man who received physical healing and forgiveness of his sins (cf. Mark 2:1-12). Be that as it may, people are at the liberty of accepting or

¹⁵² Latourelle, *The Miracles of Jesus and the Theology of Miracles*, 207.

¹⁵³ John Paul II, "Miraculous Signs Reveal Christ's Power, General Audience," in *Interdisciplinary Encyclopedia of Science and Religion*, (November 25, 1987), accessed April 30, 2017, <http://inters.org/John-Paul-II-Catechesis-Miracles-Christ>.

¹⁵⁴ Latourelle, *The Miracles of Jesus and the Theology of Miracles*, 282.

rejecting this as the manifestation of God's plans. Regardless of these great signs from Christ, he was crucified by the people who did not accept his powerful works. From the perspective of Matthew's account, Jesus has authority over sickness, death, wind, the sea, and the Satan (cf. Matt. 8-9). He gave this power to his apostles and his Church to exercise in his name. His sovereignty is all over the world judging by his action and the mandates he gave to his apostles (cf. Matt. 28:18). On the other hand, Luke's account views the signs of God's power in the miracles as one who reveals himself and saves us definitively.¹⁵⁵ From the perspective of Johannine account, he sees miracles as the work of the Father and Son. Jesus Christ is doing the same work his Father does in raising the dead and giving them life (cf. John 5:20-21). Finally, John Paul II says, "yes, all the 'mighty deeds, wonders and signs' of Christ are for the purpose of revealing him as Messiah, as Son of God, for the revelation of him who alone has the power to free mankind from sin and from death, of him who is truly the Savior of the world."¹⁵⁶ Hence, God manifests his power and love for humanity through miracles.

1.3.2 Miracles as Signs of the Love of God

Miracles are not just a show of authority of God to amaze us, but power in service of his love.¹⁵⁷ It is here that we encounter God's love in its tangible form, especially through Christ's deeds. John Paul II accepts the fact that miracles of Christ manifest not only his power but also his love for humanity. According to him, "they also reveal God's love for humanity-particularly for those who suffer, who are in need, who implore healing, pardon and compassion."¹⁵⁸ In fact, God is love (1 Joh 4:8). God's actions and moves certainly exhibit his love for humanity.

A careful reading of the Gospels avails us of the understanding of Christ's miracles as an act of love from God. Christ sometimes initiates this gesture of love out of his compassion for the people. He lifts people up and transforms their sorrows into joy, thereby manifesting who he is and what he stands for. Instances of this abound in the Scripture, the multiplication of the loaves (cf. Mark 6:34), the raising of the son of the widow of Nain (cf. Luk 7:13), the healing of the man with the withered hand (cf. Luke 6:6-7), and

¹⁵⁵ Latourelle, 282.

¹⁵⁶ John Paul II, "Miraculous Signs Reveal Christ's Power."

¹⁵⁷ Latourelle, *The Miracles of Jesus and the Theology of Miracles*, 283.

¹⁵⁸ John Paul II, "Christ's Miracles Manifest Salvific Love, General Audience," in *Interdisciplinary Encyclopedia of Science and Religion*, (December 9, 1987), accessed April 30, 2017, <http://inters.org/John-Paul-II-Catechesis-Miracles-Love>.

the crippled woman (cf. Luke 13:11-12). Sometimes, it is in response to entreaties made to him by the person in need, or his or her relatives in behalf of him or her. These petitions can be expressed in words or implied in the action of the people as the case may be. Some examples of miracles in this group are the two blind men at Jericho that requested that their eyes be opened (cf. Matt. 20:29-34), the Canaanite woman who wins the desired healing by her persistence (cf. Matt. 15:21-28). Other examples are the leper that begged Jesus to make him clean (cf. Mark 1:40-41), the centurion (cf. Luke 7; 3), and Mary and Martha about the raising of Lazarus from the dead (cf. John 11:3). The woman with a haemorrhage only touched his garment and got healed. As a sign of love, Jesus' miracles are not intended to punish people but to restore God's love where the evil one has put confusion. When the apostles wanted to use such power to punish those blocking their way by calling down fire from heaven, Christ cautioned them against such motives (cf. Luke 9:55). In fact, Jesus performed miracles for the sake of the kingdom and not for his benefits (cf. Luke 4:3-4; Matt. 26:53).

Furthermore, love was the motive behind Christ's healings on Sabbath days. He has no intention to violate the holy day of God (cf. Luke 2:27-28). All these actions are gestures of love from God through Christ. There are no other better words with which to describe these deeds than 'merciful love,' because they are a gratuitous gift from God. Christ empathises with us, especially in our most vulnerable moments. René Latourelle aptly asserts that, "God is love, and in Christ this love takes a human form, is mediated through a human heart, finds expression in human language, in order that it may encounter human beings at the level they experience their wretchedness and may bring home to them the intensity of God's concern for them."¹⁵⁹ The love of Christ and his merciful works reveal the kingdom of God.

1.3.3 Miracles as Signs of the Coming of the Kingdom of God

In the words of Walter Kasper, "the miracles that show the entry of the Kingdom of God into the world are also miracles performed by Jesus: If it is by the finger of God that 'I' cast out demons, then the Kingdom of God has come upon you' (Lk 11.20)."¹⁶⁰ Miracles especially that of Jesus Christ have a serious connection with the coming kingdom which was prophesied by Isaiah. In his prophecy, he made mention of what would be the signs of this new kingdom, the messianic era. According to Isaiah, "the eyes of the blind shall

¹⁵⁹ Latourelle, *The Miracles of Jesus and the Theology of Miracles*, 283.

¹⁶⁰ Kasper, *Jesus the Christ*, 84.

be opened, and the ears of the deaf unstopped; then the lame shall leap like a deer, and the tongue of the speechless sing for joy” (Isa. 35:5-6; cf. Isa. 29:18). He equally prophesied saying, then “your dead shall live, their corpses shall rise” (Isa. 26:19). In the works of Jesus Christ, these signs of the coming kingdom find fulfilment, and the messianic reign has begun. In other words, they are not works of one who is into show business, but one who fulfils God’s plans in line with the prophecy of the Old Testament.

According to Walter Kasper, “Jesus’ miracles are signs of the arrival of the Kingdom of God. His coming means the beginning of the end of Satan’s Kingdom. The two go together: ‘But if it is by the Spirit of God I cast out demons, then the Kingdom of God has come upon you’ (Mt 12:28). A feature of the kingdom of demons is its hostility to creation. The alienation of man from God results in the alienation of man from himself and from nature.”¹⁶¹ Hence, the power of the Messiah is effective both in physical and spiritual healings, and exorcisms; dethroning the kingdom of the evil one and restoring the kingdom of God. Jesus once alluded to his Power in his answer to the Pharisees’ query: “But if it is by the Spirit of God that I cast out demons, then the kingdom of God has come to you” (Matt.12:28). Thereby making it known to them that his works are the fulfilment of the prophecy which they have been anticipating. In the words of René Latourelle, God has kick-started the work of salvation in and through Christ: “He signals, through the healings and exorcisms of Jesus and the evangelization of the poor, that this work is a serious one. Material realities undergo change to make it clear that human beings too must change. Miracles and conversion are inseparable in the proclamation of the good news. Jesus comes to make possible what is impossible for human beings on their own.”¹⁶² His miracles made known the entrance of one stronger than the evil spirit that has held humanity down for a long time.

Miracles of Jesus lead us to the issues of his identity. Who is this that has enormous power over everything (cf. Luke 8:25b)? When John the Baptist found himself in the same condition with others, he sent two of his disciples to verify the identity of Jesus. Jesus told the disciples of John to inform him that, “the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, the poor have good news brought to them” (Luke 7:18-23). In fact, he confirms his identity by referring to what Isaiah prophesied about the coming Messiah which he embodies and manifests in his

¹⁶¹ Kasper, 83.

¹⁶² Latourelle, *The Miracles of Jesus and the Theology of Miracles*, 20.

mighty deeds. Moreover, Jesus is the long-awaited Messiah, who has inaugurated the kingdom of God by his powerful works.

“The Kingdom of God is an eschatological phenomenon, pointing to the future, and so also are the miracles of Jesus. They are *signa prognostica*, a first sight, the dawn of the new creation, a taste of the future inaugurated by Christ. They are therefore guarantees of man’s hope for the liberation of himself and his world from its bondage to decay (Rom 8.21),”¹⁶³ Walter Kasper asserts. The kingdom is here present with us and not in the utopian world. “In Christ the power of God is at work, that irrepressible power that is capable of transforming the entire person, body and soul, into the image of Christ.”¹⁶⁴ In fact, the Scriptures have it that miracles shall mark the coming of the kingdom of God. Healings and deliverance from sin, miracles, and exorcisms are evidence of the commencement of the Messianic mission and kingdom.

1.3.4 Miracles as Signs of a Divine Mission

Miracles serve as signs that attest the authority of messengers and their message. Miracles are part of the procedures for sainthood, and they authenticate the status of a would-be saint before God. They have the duty of legitimising a person and their message. René Latourelle says that “throughout the biblical tradition miracles have as their principal function to authenticate a mission as being from God. They are actions by which God attests the authenticity of a mission that he has bestowed.”¹⁶⁵ It is in the culture of the people of Israel to request for an authenticating sign from any prophet. They want to be sure on whose mandate the prophet is speaking. From the Old Testament down to the New Testament, God accompanied his prophets and leaders with signs. Signs legitimised Moses, Elijah and others in the Old Testament who performed them to authenticate their Divine commission (cf. Exod.14:31; 1Kings 18:37-39). It is inherent in people to seek for a rational foundation in which to place their trust in another person’s words. That is why Christ was asked by the Jews to perform a sign in support of his claim of being a Divine Messenger (John 2:18).¹⁶⁶ In another occasion, Jesus invoked his mighty works as his credential that confirms his Divine mission. At the same time, Jesus asked Philip to

¹⁶³ Kasper, *Jesus the Christ*, 83.

¹⁶⁴ Latourelle, *The Miracles of Jesus and the Theology of Miracles*, 284.

¹⁶⁵ Latourelle, 284-285.

¹⁶⁶ Latourelle, 285.

believe in him if not for any other thing, at least for the sake of the work he has done (cf. John 14:11).

If we understand Christ's miracles as actions, which powerfully inaugurate the kingdom of God foretold long ago, then we will certainly appreciate Christ's role in this kingdom. In the words of Walter Kasper, "miracles are signs of Jesus' mission and authority. He is not only the Messiah of words, but also the Messiah of action. He brings the kingdom by word and work."¹⁶⁷ His role was divinely assigned and authenticated by so many miracles he did when he was in the world. He has the power to heal all our ailments and to cast out Satan. Accordingly, "miracles prove *directly* that the time of fulfilment has come and the kingdom is here; they prove *implicitly* that Jesus is he who is to come and establish the new kingdom."¹⁶⁸

The signs of the Divine mission is lucidly present in the Gospel of John who uses the word 'signs' (*semeia*) to represent miracles. As a matter of fact, many people came to believe in Jesus because of the signs he performed. From the first recorded miracle in the Gospel of John, turning water into wine (cf. John 2:23), to the case of the man born blind (cf. John 9:33), they served as signs authenticating his Divine mission and mandate. On the day of Pentecost, Peter reminded the Jews of the authenticity of Christ mission by pointing at his miracles. "A man attested to you by God with deeds of power, wonders, and signs that God did through him among you" (Acts 2:22).

Miracles are expected to produce disciples who would spread the good news about the favour they have received from God. Some of the people who received healing from Jesus turned out to be his great disciples afterwards. An example of such people is the Demoniac from Gerasene in Mark Gospel. (5:1-20). Furthermore, Jesus gave his disciples not only authority in word but also in action, to cast out demons and cure every sickness (cf. Matt.10:1). Interestingly, apostles proved to the people that they have a Divine mandate by so many miracles that accompanied their missions. It is worthy to note that they did all the signs in the name of the Risen Christ (cf. Acts 3:6; 4:30; 3:16).

According to Paul, miracles are acts of the power of God made manifest in the preaching of the apostles. Miracles are signs that follow true disciples of Christ on whose name they were able to perform such wonders. Thus he told the Colossians, "the signs of a true

¹⁶⁷ Kasper, *Jesus the Christ*, 84.

¹⁶⁸ Latourelle, *The Miracles of Jesus and the Theology of Miracles*, 285.

apostle were performed among you with utmost patience, signs and wonders and mighty works” (2 Cor. 12:12). Paul is happy about what he was able to achieve in his mission by God’s grace especially signs and wonders that graced the whole mission (cf. Rom. 15:17-19). By and large, the idea that miracles authenticate the mission of the apostles are common in the Epistles. Through miracles, God approved the proclamation of the apostles about the resurrection of Christ Jesus. Therefore, people were able to place their faith in the message of the resurrection, because of the signs they performed as evidence of their authenticity. In fact, people gave glory to Christ for the wonders he has done in their midst.

1.3.5 Miracles as Signs of the Glory of Christ

Our understanding of miracles differs significantly from that of Jesus; this can be deduced from his sayings in that regard. For us, they are signs from God manifesting his love for us, especially in our difficult moments, while for Jesus they are works of the Son of God. Miracles, when seen as works of the Son of God bring out the intimate relationship between him and the Father and his Divine nature.¹⁶⁹ Through the miracles, the Father bears witness to his Son whom he has given all authority in heaven and on earth. He is greater than any person in the world and heaven because he is the Divine Son of the Father (cf. Matt.12:41-42; Mark 9: 2-10; Luke 7:18-28 & Mark 12:1-2). Consequently, the power to perform miracle is part of his nature. That was evident when he walked on the sea and saved Peter from sinking, the people in the boat did him homage. They said, “truly you are the Son of God” (Matt.14:33).

Miracles of Jesus as the works of the Son of God are Divine actions carried out by him in the world. These works bear testimony to his claim of being the Son of God and accredit his mission as well. As the Son of the Father, he has the power to perform wonders and signs that are attendant to his preaching and teaching. “They are the inimitable seal set by divine omnipotence on this man who calls himself Son of the Father; they signify his glory as the only Son.”¹⁷⁰ Christ on some occasions alluded to his miracles as God’s testimonies to his claim of being his son before his opponents. It is only God who has such capacity to approve his own with mighty works. “The works that the Father has given me to complete, the very works that I am doing, testify on my behalf that the Father

¹⁶⁹ Latourelle, *The Theology of Revelation*, 394.

¹⁷⁰ Latourelle, *The Miracles of Jesus and the Theology of Miracles*, 287.

has sent me” (John 5:36; 10:25). He encourages those doubting him to consider his works and accept his claim of being Son and messenger of God.

Moreover, one is culpable after witnessing all these signs and remains adamant to the overture of God’s love. In John’s Gospel, Jesus reminded the people the consequence of rejecting God’s knowledge through miracles: “If I had not done among them the works that no one else did, they would not have sin. But now they have seen and hated both me and my Father” (John 15:24). However, this does not mean that miracles are to coerce us into believing in God, but they are to help us make a rational decision about him. Be that as it may, some people did not accept him, and so, they wanted to stone him for blasphemy (cf. John 10:31-34). In other words, they rejected the purpose which is revealed in and through his miracles, his glory as the only Son of God.¹⁷¹

In the synoptic Gospels, the emphasis is on the idea that miracles are signs of the coming kingdom of God. While John’s gospel pays attention to the person of Jesus as the source of the power active in the work he has done. Miracles are signs manifesting Jesus glory to believers and non-believers as the Son of God, who has received all authority and power from God. “Speaking of the first sign performed at Cana of Galilee, the evangelist John observed that by means of that sign Jesus ‘manifested his glory and his disciples believed in him’ (Jn 2:11).”¹⁷² More still, miracles direct our attention to the person who performs the signs and their meaning. They are not ordinary wonders but have a purpose of drawing us to the person of Christ who is the centre of everything. René Latourelle in his book, *The Miracles of Jesus and the Theology of Miracles*, contends that “the works *issue* from his person as Son and are the outward manifestations of his divine being; the signs *converge* on his person, as rays of light draw the eye to their source.”¹⁷³

1.3.6 Miracles as Signs of Revelation of the Trinitarian Mystery

“The miraculous works of Christ, in the perspective of the fourth Gospel, are not only the seal of the Father on the word of the Son; they also give access to the mystery of the Trinity itself.”¹⁷⁴ With these words, René Latourelle explained the role of the Triune God in the miraculous events in the life of Jesus and other miracles as well. The works of the

¹⁷¹ Latourelle, 288.

¹⁷² John Paul II, “Christ’s Miracles: a Salvific Signs, General Audience,” in *Interdisciplinary Encyclopedia of Science and Religion*, (December 02, 1987), accessed April 30, 2017, <http://inters.org/John-Paul-II-Catechesis-Miracles-Salvation>.

¹⁷³ Latourelle, *The Miracles of Jesus Christ and Theology of Miracles*, 288.

¹⁷⁴ Latourelle, *The Theology of Revelation*, 395.

Father and the Son are not separated for any reason at all because he receives the power to do such from the Father. The explanation reveals the bond between the Son and the Father. “‘The glory of the Father and the glory of the Son are indissolubly united.’ Just as the Father raises the dead to life, so the Son gives life to whom he will (Jn. 5:21). ‘The works that the Father has given me to accomplish,’ says Christ, ‘these very works that I do accomplish’ (Jn. 5: 36).”¹⁷⁵ As a result, we can see in Christ’s works the Father whom he manifests in all ramifications (cf. John 14:10-11). At the same time, they are his works, because he has been entrusted with all the authority.

Furthermore, the apostles continued with the work of healing and casting out evil spirits under the unction of the Holy Spirit. The greater part of these happened after they have received the Holy Spirit on the Pentecost day. The Spirit empowered them to perform many signs, Peter (cf. Acts 3:6-8), Stephen (cf. Acts 6:8), and Paul (cf. Acts 19:11; 20:12) performed many signs. This mission is part of the mandate they have received from Christ (cf. Mark 16:15-18). Paul’s understanding of miracles as a gift of the Spirit goes a long way to demonstrate the role of the Spirit in the miraculous events. He grouped miracles under the gifts of Holy Spirit. Thus he says, “to one is given through the Spirit the utterance of wisdom, and to another the utterance of knowledge according to the same Spirit, to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit, to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy,...All these are activated by one and the same Spirit, who allots to each one individually just as the Spirit chooses” (1 Cor. 12:7-11). The apostles and others continue to exercise these gifts of the Holy Spirit by the power of Christ. Therefore, we can see the relationship between the Father, and the Son and Holy Spirit united in a mysterious way achieving God’s plan of salvation. The Father sent the Son, and the Son sent the Holy Spirit who proceeds from the Father and the Son.

Finally, the works of Christ and his mission mandate to the apostles revealed the Trinitarian mystery. However, this is possible only when we consider Jesus’ testimony about himself and his mission of salvation. Hence, Jesus told his disciples to see him is to see the Father thereby revealing his relationship with God the Father.¹⁷⁶

¹⁷⁵ Latourelle, 395.

¹⁷⁶ Latourelle, 396.

1.3.7 Miracles as Symbols of the Sacramental Economy

Miracles are means and signs of Divine Revelation as well as the reality they reveal. In other words, they are the giver and the gift to some extent. In the words of René Latourelle, “not only do miracles accompany a message which they authenticate; they are themselves revelation, light, good news, message, saving word. They both interpret and represent the mysterious reality.”¹⁷⁷ Christ-event is the watershed in the history of our salvation as God’s people. The new kingdom is inaugurated by his words and authenticated by his miracles. Through miracles, we get an inkling of what the new world of grace looks like. Miracles are gratuitous gesture of love from God through Jesus Christ. Miraculous signs are symbolic. Their in-depth meanings are apprehended through the discourse or words of interpretation following them. We can apprehend the symbolic meaning of miracles only by interpretation. It is in John’s Gospel more than in the synoptic Gospels that the meaning of Jesus’ miracles is expressed.

In the synoptic Gospels, we can deduce these symbolic meanings of miracles as follows: The miraculous catch of fish is certainly, a clear sign of what would be the condition of the Church in the future regarding its expansion (cf. Luke 5:4-10). The cure of the paralytic brings out the hidden meaning of Christ work of grace that has the power of turning around our nature. He not only heals the paralytic man but also absolves him of his sin which is the cause of his problem (cf. Mark 2:5-11). “He attacks first of all the root of the evil, sin, but his activity of salvation, in so far as it is tangible, symbolizes the spiritual activity of salvation at the same time that it guarantees it.”¹⁷⁸ The healing of a leper in Mark (1:40-45), symbolises the return of a sinner to God’s kingdom. The meaning of this action is apprehended very well when one considers the condition of a leper in the society then. A leper is ostracised from the community completely. For René Latourelle laying of hands and anointing with oil as methods of healing have the symbolism of a sacrament of the Church: “On the healing of the sick by the laying on of hands and the anointing of oil made by the apostles over the sick (Mk. 6:13)”, they are a prefiguring of the sacramental anointing made by the Church in the name of Christ.”¹⁷⁹

In the Johannine account of Jesus’ miracles, their symbolic meanings are clear. He did not stop with the authenticating function of miracles but went ahead to adduce the hidden

¹⁷⁷ Latourelle, *The Miracles of Jesus and the Theology of Miracles*, 289.

¹⁷⁸ Latourelle, *The Theology of Revelation*, 397.

¹⁷⁹ Latourelle, 397.

meaning of the miraculous events. With the use of the term “signs” to designate what the synoptic writers described as the works of Christ, he has the intention of leading us beyond the visible. These signs are not normal signs but symbols which point beyond themselves. In the opinion of one of the well known contemporary theologians of miracles, René Latourelle, “the miracles of Christ do in fact reveal to us the mystery of his person and mission and of the economy of grace which he establishes through the sacraments.”¹⁸⁰ The symbolic meaning of the miracles is present in John’s Gospel account. The changing of water into wine signals the new creation (cf. John 2). At the fullness of everything, God sent his only Son to save humanity. The ‘six’ jars stood for the fullness of everything when God sent his Son to save humanity through his death on the cross. The ‘wine that was served last’ stands for the ‘blood that was shed for our salvation’. According to René Latourelle, “this new wine is a sign of the new covenant in the blood of Christ, sign of the marriage between Christ and His Church, sign of our entry into the new society by water and blood, that is, by Baptism and Eucharist.”¹⁸¹ The healing of a paralytic by words and water of a pool represent matter and form of the baptism (cf. Joh 5). The healing symbolises restoration of human beings to the status of sons and daughters of God through baptism. Besides, the issue of the multiplication of bread is the symbol of the Eucharist which is the bread that gives eternal life. It is a sign that “the bread of God is that which comes down from heaven and gives life to the world” (John 6:33). Finally, the raising of Lazarus (cf. John 11:1-44), symbolically presents Christ as the resurrection and life. He proves that he has the power to restore life to what is dead. The raising of Lazarus symbolises the complete victory of Christ over death and anticipates our resurrection at the end of everything.¹⁸² In John’s Gospel, people can find great symbols which illustrate our desire for salvation. Such sayings as: ‘I am the bread of life,’ ‘I am the light of the world,’ ‘I am the good shepherd,’ ‘I am the resurrection and the life,’ and these have a significant impact on our being. In fact, they can shift our horizon and transform our lives for better.

13.8 Miracles as Signs of the Transformation of the Passing World

Miracles are signs of eschatological transformation that will take place on the final day. People believe that on the last day that they will be transformed to be like our Lord, Jesus

¹⁸⁰ Latourelle, *The Miracles of Jesus and the Theology of Miracles*, 290.

¹⁸¹ Latourelle, *The Theology of Revelation*, 398.

¹⁸² Latourelle, *The Miracles of Jesus and the Theology of Miracles*, 291.

Christ. This transformation is all-embracing, touching spiritual and physical aspects of our reality. Miracles are signs of this transformation and liberation people are anticipating. The liberation from the power of Satan and healings from different ailments will be fully actualized on the last day. In the words of Walter Kasper mentioned before “the Kingdom of God is an eschatological phenomenon, pointing to the future, and so also are the miracles of Jesus. They are *signa prognostica*, a first sight, the dawn of the new creation, a taste of the future inaugurated by Christ.”¹⁸³ Our bodies will be transformed like his if we die with him because he is going to raise us up on the last day. Christ is our leader and “he is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead” (Col.1:18), “who abolished death and brought life” (2 Tim.1:10). His resurrection is assurance that we will rise like him if we are united with him in his death (cf. Rom.6:5). He will give our bodies life (cf. Rom.8:11). In fact, on the last day, “this perishable body must put on imperishability, and this mortal body must put on immortality” (1 Cor.15:53). Hence, miracles stand as a foretaste of this invisible reality that will come into the full light on the last day. Miracles are signs and hope that the salvation of humanity is a reality.

Moreover, the effect of the miraculous signs also extends to the universe as a whole. “According to biblical mentality, there is an intimate solidarity between man and the physical universe. Man and earth from which he has been drawn (Gen 2:7) share the same destiny,”¹⁸⁴ says René Latourelle. The whole universe is affected by human actions, be it good or bad. In the words of Walter Kasper, “a feature of the kingdom of demons is its hostility to creation. The alienation of man from God results in the alienation of man from himself and from nature.”¹⁸⁵ That is why we are noticing depreciation in the world because of people’s sins. Hence, the redemption that is ongoing will address everything and restore them to their original state. In the Book of Genesis, the harmony of creation was violated by Adam’s sin. The relationship between man and his environment has severed, and the deterioration of everything sets in.¹⁸⁶ Miracles are signs of hope that everything will be redeemed and restored to their original state. According to Walter Kasper, “when fellowship with God is restored, when the Kingdom of God is established, things go ‘back to normal’ and the world becomes well again.”¹⁸⁷ Christ came to restore everything through his paschal mystery. The severed relationship existing between God

¹⁸³ Kasper, *Jesus the Christ*, 83.

¹⁸⁴ Latourelle, *The Theology of Revelation*, 399.

¹⁸⁵ Kasper, *Jesus the Christ*, 83.

¹⁸⁶ Latourelle, *The Theology of Revelation*, 399.

¹⁸⁷ Kasper, *Jesus the Christ*, 83.

and man, man and his environment has been renewed. The power of evil one and sins have been dealt a heavy blow by Christ, the new Adam.¹⁸⁸ Miracles of Jesus are signs of this renewal in the kingdom of God visibly present. An instance of this redemption of the universe in the Gospel is the nature miracles performed by Jesus, the feeding of five thousand (cf. Mar 6: 30). Paul corroborates this notion when he says, “the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the children of God; for the creation was subjected to futility, not of its own will but by the will of the one who subjected it” (Rom. 8:19-20). Miracles are signs pointing to this eschatological reality that will be actualised finally on the last day. They serve as a pointer to the transformation that has started through Christ events which are all-embracing. “Between Genesis and Apocalypse, which is the time of Israel and the Church, miracle is a beam of light, prefiguring the full light to come.”¹⁸⁹ Faith is the key to understand this transformation that has started which will culminate on the last day.

1.3.9 Miracles as Signs of Faith

Miracles are meaningful when viewed through the prism of religion, which entails trust in the power of God. Alternatively, faith in the power of Jesus to do that which human beings cannot do to help themselves. The trust is noticeable by people’s petition to Jesus to help them overcome their predicaments. The petitions and representations by people to Jesus Christ are sure signs of their trust in his ability to help them overcome their predicaments. Miraculous signs are a response from God to the petitions made to him by people in faith. In fact, miracles and faith go hand in hand, and faith is necessary for miracles to take place.

The link between faith and miracles abound in the Scripture, and Jesus would normally say, go ‘your faith has made you well’ or ‘seeing their faith he healed them’ (cf. Mark 5:34; 10:52; Matt. 9:22; Luke 17:19; Mark 2:5). John Paul II commenting on these pericopes says, “more than once Jesus emphasized that the miracle he worked is linked to faith. ‘Your faith has saved you,’ he said to the woman who had been suffering hemorrhages for twelve years and who came up behind him, touched the hem of his garment and was healed (cf. Mt 9:20-22; and also Lk 8:48; Mk 5:34).”¹⁹⁰ On the contrary,

¹⁸⁸ Latourelle, *The Miracles of Jesus and the Theology of Miracles*, 292.

¹⁸⁹ Latourelle, *The Theology of Revelation*, 400.

¹⁹⁰ John Paul II, “Miracles are a Call to Faith, General Audience,” in *Interdisciplinary Encyclopedia of Science and Religion*, (December 16, 1987), accessed May 05, 2017, <http://inters.org/John-Paul-II-Catechesis-Miracles-Faith>.

Jesus did not perform miraculous signs where faith was lacking. In Mark's Gospel, we read that Jesus of Nazareth "could do no deed of power there, except that he laid his hands on a few sick people and cured them. And he was amazed at their unbelief" (Mark 6:5-6). They could not show signs of faith which would have elicited Christ response in solving their problems.

It is Walter Kasper who calls attention to the proper understanding of the link between faith and miracle: "When we say that faith and miracle are related as prayer and answer that does not mean that faith and prayer create the miracle. It is the mark of faith that it expects everything from God and nothing of itself."¹⁹¹ In faith, we manifest our total inability to help ourselves and so hand over our precarious condition to God completely through prayer. As we can see, the principle of faith is necessary for our relationship with God, as a condition for obtaining a miracle.¹⁹² There is a need to note that miracles do not depend in any way at all on the length or amount of fasting and prayers. God has the prerogative to intervene in people's problems whenever and however he deems fit. Faith is not necessarily the cause of miracles, but God is the source of all miraculous events. However, faith manifests our total dependence on God who can do everything.

1.4 Summary

The first chapter of this dissertation has focused on some issues in the contemporary Catholic theology of miracles under theological concept and definition of miracles. In this chapter, the biblical notion of miracles both in the Old and New Testaments was discussed and analysed at length. First, the research established that miracles are signs and means of Divine Revelation through which God manifests his Divine plans to humanity. In this same vein, Catholic Church teaches in the *Catechism of Catholic Church* that miracles of Jesus Christ and the saints are the surest signs of Divine Revelation.¹⁹³ Revelation and miracles co-exist and cannot be separated without losing a substantial meaning of each. The teaching of the of conciliar fathers of Second Vatican elucidated the relationship between Revelation and miracles and said that Jesus, perfected Revelation through his words and deeds, his signs and wonders, but especially through his death and glorious

¹⁹¹ Kasper, *Jesus of Christ*, 85.

¹⁹² John Paul II, "Miracles are a Call to Faith."

¹⁹³ CCC, 156.

resurrection from the dead.¹⁹⁴ Miracles are means of God's self-communication of his Divine purpose and wills to humanity.

In fact, miracles are signs pointing beyond the events to the purpose of the mighty deeds. Hence, miracles are self-communication of God to his people historically. In the Old Testament, God revealed himself to the people through the mighty works he did in their midst. The common idea in the Old Testament is that God is omnipotent and merciful which was noticeable in his relationship with people. In the New Testament, the research discovered that God in a special way manifested himself through the actions and mighty deeds of Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ through his extraordinary acts revealed the mystery of God and in-breaking of the kingdom of God. He did all these through his power because he is in the Father and Father is in him. More still, the research discovered that Jesus extended the authority to heal and cast out devil to his disciples and thereby authenticating their missions.

Moreover, the research found that the term 'miracles' is not directly biblical, but it is used in describing extraordinary events in the lives of people of God. The description brought out three dimensions of miracles, psychological, ontological, and semiological. In the biblical understanding of miracles, these three aspects were discovered to be prevalent. Nevertheless, miracles as sign-events were more stressed than the other aspects in the Bible.

In the general concept of miracles, the research considered the teaching of the Church about miracles under public Revelation. All the miracles in the Bible are part of public Revelation which is an article of Faith. These miracles in the Scripture are always true and valid all the time. Equally, discussed are some definitions of miracles which highlighted different aspects of miracles and the shift in the understanding of miracles. Second Vatican Council's teachings, especially that on Divine Revelation, is the watershed on the understanding of miracles in the contemporary Catholic theology. The contemporary theological definitions underscore the semiological dimension of miracles. The shift in the contemporary era is all about the significance of such miraculous events. This dimension is evidently enunciated in the works of these revered contemporary Catholic theologians: Pope John Paul II, Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, Karl Rahner, Avery Dulles, Walter Kasper, René Latourelle, and Gerald O'Collins.

¹⁹⁴ DV, 4.

Finally, with the modern understanding of miracles focusing on the sign elements of them, the research discovered that miracles are symbolic signs. As symbolic signs, they are evocative and multivalent acting in different directions at the same time. Hence, miracles manifest signs of God's power, love, faith, Divine mission, the glory of Christ, and the coming kingdom of God. These symbolic signs continue in the Church with the believers as Christ promised in the Gospel of Mark. "And these signs will accompany those who believe: by using my name they will cast out demons; they will speak in new tongues; they will pick up snakes in their hands, and if they drink any deadly thing, it will not hurt them; they will lay their hands on the sick, and they will recover" (Mark 16:17-18). The evidence of the fulfilment of this promise abounds in the history of the Church till date. The next chapter is going to consider the post-biblical miracles and their implications.

CHAPTER TWO

POST-BIBLICAL MIRACLES AND THEIR CLASSIFICATIONS

In line with the mandate Christ gave to those who believe in him that they would cure the sick and cast out demons in his name (cf. Mark 16:17), the believers continue to perform healings and other prodigious works. In the preceding chapter, I did mention that the apostles healed many and performed many miraculous signs. These mighty works did not end with them, but they continue up till now in different forms and places. Benedict Groeschel supports this notion when he says, “an astonishing degree of attention is paid in these unbelieving times to revelations apparently made to ordinary people by the Lord himself, the Blessed Virgin Mary, or other messengers from the world unknown to our earthly senses.”¹⁹⁵

Nevertheless, there is a serious cause to worry about the divide in the society in which we live today. Some see every reality from the perspective of spiritual, while some do so from the standpoint of material. Hence, the ongoing debate and struggle are attempts to present the true understanding of the world. The world is a composite reality with material and spiritual that one should not neglect any side. These extremes are causing many problems in the lives of people, especially when studying miraculous events. According to Zsolt Aradi, “we live in a world whose citizens have lost all sense of proportion, meaning, (sic) purpose. This situation has created, on the one hand, an attitude of extreme credulity amounting almost to superstition, and on the other, a belief in the exclusiveness and totality of matter. One such extreme has led to the nonsense that technology should be suppressed; the other, to the position that belief in the supernatural should be liquidated once and for all.”¹⁹⁶ Nevertheless, this research is an attempt to situate each side of the reality in its proper position especially the spiritual aspect. There is no doubt about the reality of supernatural as the research has shown, but there is equally unhealthy stress about that. Many charlatans are manipulating the knowledge of the supernatural for their ulterior motives. For proper discernment, some qualities are being looked for in each miraculous events. The virtue of humility is a necessary element of an authentic miraculous worker. No person can boast of working miracles because it is a gift from God

¹⁹⁵ Benedict J. Groeschel, *A Still, Small Voice* (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1993), 17.

¹⁹⁶ Aradi, *Understanding Miracles*, 12.

and not our making. Another sign of legitimacy is patience, which in some cases meant endurance of ridicule and insults.

Any post-biblical miracle that does not agree with the Scripture and doctrine of the Church is questionable. Private Revelation has nothing more to add to the deposit of faith which has definitively come to an end with the coming of Jesus Christ.¹⁹⁷ The subjective nature of private revelations is clear from our discussions, not minding the effect of Divine grace on the person, the personal character manages to surface somehow. This idea is in line with the Benedict Groeschel position, who said “we have seen that all private revelations come through the prism of the recipient’s personality and experiences. No matter how objective their origin in the mercy of divine grace, no matter how unexpected and unsolicited, revelations are all more or less defined within the subjectivity of the individual.”¹⁹⁸ This chapter is going to deal with the meaning of the post-biblical miracles and their attendant consequences, and classifications.

2.1. Post-Biblical Miracles

Post-biblical miracles entail all the miracles which happened after the death of the last apostle till date. In other words, called private Revelation, just to differentiate them from public Revelation. *Catechism of Catholic Church* states this vividly when it says “throughout the ages, there have been so-called “private” revelations, some of which have been recognized by the authority of the Church. They do not belong, however, to the deposit of faith. It is not their role to improve or complete Christ’s definitive Revelation, but to help live more fully by it in a certain period of history.”¹⁹⁹ Divine Revelation, otherwise called public Revelation, came to a close with the death of the last apostle. We are not expecting any new Revelation during the time of the Church. However, God still communicates with individual people for their well-being in different forms today. It is true that fullness of Divine Revelation has come to a close with Jesus Christ, but, the apprehension of the message is still ongoing. All the manifestation of the gifts of the Spirit is helping us toward a complete understanding of Christ message. According to Benedict Groeschel, “the end of public revelation does not at all mean that God no longer reveals himself to his children. He continues to do so, but now indirectly or in what we call private

¹⁹⁷ John Thavis, *The Vatican Prophecy: Investigating Supernatural Signs, Apparitions, and Miracles in the Modern Age* (New York: Viking, 2015), 243-4.

¹⁹⁸ Groeschel, *A Still, Small Voice*, 49-50.

¹⁹⁹ CCC, 67.

revelations, as well as by other means of his Divine Providence.”²⁰⁰ In this research, the expressions private Revelation and post-biblical miracles have the same meaning and will be used interchangeably.

Private Revelation does not mean to say that it concerns only the individual who has had the encounter. Sometimes the consequential effect is noticeable in the life of the Church as a whole. According to *Verbum Domini*, “a private revelation can introduce new emphases, give rise to new forms of piety, or deepen older ones. It can have a certain prophetic character (cf. *1 Th* 5:19-21) and can be a valuable aid for better understanding and living the Gospel at a certain time; consequently it should not be treated lightly.”²⁰¹ Karl Rahner contends that private Revelation is authentic means of Revelation, but not object of Divine faith. It helps us in deepening our confidence in what God has revealed in the Scripture.²⁰² There is this view that those who have had the experience could accept that with Divine faith after approval. “The very fact that the approval is given after careful examination by experts in such matters is a guarantee that humanly speaking there is sufficient reason for a prudent assent.”²⁰³ Nevertheless, this does not mean that one is compelled to accept it. One is at liberty to accept it or not. As for Avery Dulles, a Catholic is not forbidden to have a personal opinion about the private Revelation even when the Church has given her approval and encouragement.²⁰⁴

The adoption by the Church does not entail the truth of every detail because there may be some inaccuracies during transmission. What is necessary for any person accepting the post-biblical miracles is human faith and not Divine faith that is the position of the Cardinal Prospero Lambertini.²⁰⁵ That notwithstanding, when private Revelations receive approval, one is encouraged to accept them in the faith of the Church with caution. P. De Letter argues that “when private revelations have been recognized as authentic by the Church and have proved their genuineness in the fruits for the spiritual life of her members, then it is right, after her example, to heed their message and to learn the practical lesson that the Spirit of Christ teaches through them. Not to do so would be to

²⁰⁰ Groeschel, *A Still, Small Voice*, 25.

²⁰¹ Benedict XVI, “*Verbum Domini*,” 14.

²⁰² Karl Rahner, ed., “Private Revelation,” in *Encyclopedia of Theology: Concise Sacramentum Mundi* (New York: St. Paul, 1975), 1471-2.

²⁰³ P. De Letter ed., “Revelation, Private,” in *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, 2nd ed., ed. Berard L. Marthaler (Detroit: Gale, 2003), 12:202.

²⁰⁴ Dulles, *The Assurance of Things Hoped for*, 200.

²⁰⁵ Benedict XIV, *Heroic Virtues; A portion of the Treatise of Benedict XIV on the Beatification and canonization of the Servants of God*, vol.3 (London: Forgotten Books, 2015).

neglect a grace given for the spiritual good of the members of the Church.”²⁰⁶ Be that as it may, faith in the official doctrines of Catholic Church demand Divine faith always and is necessary for salvation.

Cardinal Ratzinger gave the reason why the Church is not so much in haste to say something about the private Revelation. According to him, “the Holy Father deems that it would add nothing to what a Christian must know from Revelation and also from the Marian apparitions approved by the Church in their known contents, which only reconfirmed the urgency of penance, conversion, forgiveness, fasting.”²⁰⁷ Nevertheless, it does not mean that the Church has nothing to do with private Revelations: healings, apparitions, visions and messages that accompany them. No, they play a role in guiding the faithful in the midst of all alleged miraculous events.

The gifts of performing miracles are for the common good of the Church and not just for an individual gain so to speak. It is not a good omen desiring these gifts as if they make one to be holy. They are not signs of holiness. The reality of this kind of Revelation is evident as a fruit of the Spirit in the Church. Indeed, these fruits are not lacking in the Church as Benedict Groeschel contends. According to him, “it is not difficult to find reports of miracles or at least of cures and healing associated with an alleged revelation. The excitement and attention that a private revelation causes may attract many who are very understandably seeking help from God for some illness or problem that is beyond their ability to cope with.”²⁰⁸ Any attempt to deny such event will affect our faith which has its foundation in the Revelation given to individuals: like apostles and prophets. The theology of post-biblical miracles is necessary because, without the belief in a free manifestation of God in the history of our salvation as written in the Bible, the Christian religion is not possible. Christianity has its foundation in the free Revelation of God to humanity.²⁰⁹ The essence of these miracles is the same with that of public Revelation. They communicate knowledge of God which under normal circumstances people cannot apprehend. Private Revelation is credible in so far as it leads one to public Revelations.²¹⁰ Be that as it may, private Revelations cannot replace the position of public Revelations and official doctrine of the Church. They can only aid the official doctrine of the Church.

²⁰⁶ Letter, “Revelation, Private,” 202.

²⁰⁷ Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger with Vittorio Messori, *The Ratzinger Report*, trans. Salvator Attanasio and Graham Harrison (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1986), 110.

²⁰⁸ Groeschel, *A Still, Small Voice*, 96.

²⁰⁹ Schwebel, *Apparition, Healings and Weeping Madonnas*, 3.

²¹⁰ Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, “The Message of Fatima.”

“Although seeking miracles is often an attempt to quench an authentic thirst for the spiritual and an opportunity to quell spiritual doubts, miraculous phenomena are not a substitute for absolute faith in God. The centre of the Catholic Faith can be found in the person, acts, and words of Jesus Christ,”²¹¹ says Michael O’Neill.

The Church has witnessed men and women endowed with different gifts of the Holy Spirit which have borne fruits spiritually through her history. They are not new doctrines, albeit, they call our attention to the doctrines and teachings of the Church. The Church must guide our attitude towards such Revelations.²¹² Interestingly, the tradition and practices of the Church presuppose the existence of certain private Revelations. The trial of miracles during the procedure for sainthood is evidence of post-biblical miracles.

Nevertheless, because of the composite nature of human beings, there is a tendency of misrepresentation and misinterpretation of the miraculous events. Moreover, different Church documents have stated the criteria with which to determine the authenticity of these miracles. The most important principle in authenticating private Revelation is its ability to lead people to Christ. According to *Verbum Domini*, “the criterion for judging the truth of a private revelation is its orientation to Christ himself. If it leads us away from him, then it certainly does not come from the Holy Spirit, who guides us more deeply into the Gospel, and not away from it.”²¹³ In all honesty, it is not easy to determine the authentic private Revelations from God with all the criteria laid down. Many times, rejection of some authentic private Revelations is because of errors during the transmission on the part of recipient or recipients. Divine and human elements are mixed up in the process of relating the miracles most often.

The excessive and uncontrollable quest for the supernatural is the main reason why the Church is interested in the discernment. Discernment will help the people to focus on the proper form of Revelation which is fundamental to our Faith. In line with this Michael O’Neill said: “excessive, obsessive expression of belief by the faithful in miraculous phenomena is not only the reason the Church is methodical and cautious in approving any occurrence as authentic but also a primary impetus for performing any investigations in the first place.”²¹⁴ The mixture in the process of consigning the said miracles in writing

²¹¹ O’Neill, *Exploring the Miraculous*, 30-31.

²¹² Dulles, *The Assurance of Things Hoped For*, 198-199.

²¹³ Benedict XVI, “*Verbum Domini*,” 14.

²¹⁴ O’Neill, *Exploring the Miraculous*, 30.

justifies the reluctance with which the Church attends to post-biblical miracles. Probably, she is prudent in that regard. The Church's approval of "a private revelation essentially means that its message contains nothing contrary to faith and morals; it is licit to make it public and the faithful are authorized to give to it their prudent adhesion."²¹⁵ The reluctance is even more now in the contemporary period, because of the discovery that social and psychological condition of the recipient may affect the vision and audition.²¹⁶ That calls for special attention in evaluating the account of the vision and message of miraculous events.

The need to examine post-biblical miracles is more urgent now than before because of fake news flying around and people's gullibility. John Thavis highlighted this urgent need clearly when he says, "today, with the global media attention focused on every new claim of the miraculous and Internet pages dedicated to the least "divine" messages, the Vatican is ever more sensitive to the potential damage, both internal and external, posed by false miracles, apparitions, and prophecies. Internally the risk is primarily that of sowing confusion and doubt among the faithful."²¹⁷ Hence, the need to examine these miracles in the life of the Church, as to help people make a rational and informed decision about them. The urgency of discernment is necessary because dishonest people have keyed in into this awareness to achieve their ulterior motives. In the words of Michael O'Neill, "this greater exposure might represent a heightened interest in these happenings but does not explain such a dramatic increase in alleged phenomena themselves, other than to suggest that it inspired some charlatans, the mentally unstable, attention seekers, or other pious frauds to be swept up in the fanaticism."²¹⁸ As the world is growing in scientific knowledge, the requirements for authenticating miraculous events are increasing as well. The aim is to meet up with the credible level of acceptance to a contemporary man. Gone are the days of popular acclamation in the areas of miracles and apparitions.

According to Benedict Groeschel, there are many sources of false Revelation which he discussed in his book, *A Still, Small Voice*. He says "the possible causes of false revelation are many. Severe mental illness, especially a certain kind of paranoid schizophrenia, may create in a subject's mind not only a grandiose need to make some monumental

²¹⁵ Benedict XVI, "*Verbum Domini*," 14.

²¹⁶ Dulles, *The Assurance of Things Hoped For*, 200.

²¹⁷ Thavis, *The Vatican Prophecies*, 5.

²¹⁸ O'Neill, *Exploring the Miraculous*, 67.

contribution to history but also hallucinatory experiences of a pseudo-mystical type.”²¹⁹ These people are convinced and can convince others because within them they do not feel any sense of guilt. They are sick, but they do not know that they are not stable. These people are not out to deceive people; rather, they believe that they are truly communicating what they have received from a supernatural being. Source of false Revelation may come from people who feel that they are pleasing to God. This idea is truly a manifestation of psychological problem indirectly. “False revelations may also arise from a very devout view of life, combined with a suggestive type of personality, clinically called borderline histrionic.”²²⁰ Even those who are well can as well be a victim of such psychological disorder, because of their experience in life. It is good to note that genuine devotion could emanate from fraudulent claims of Revelation but it is not necessarily coming from the fraudster. In the words of Benedict Groeschel, “there may be a good deal of genuine piety surrounding a fraudulent revelation, but none of it comes from the charlatan himself.”²²¹ It is not possible to judge the reported revelation by its fruits only without considering other aspects of person’s spiritual life.

Benedict Groeschel enumerated some reasons why authentic private Revelations may contain errors in line with Poulain. According to him private Revelation may contain errors because of, “(a) faulty interpretation on the part of the recipient or others, (b) a tendency to use a revelation to write history rather than to use it symbolically, (c) the tendency of the visionary to mix subjective expectations and preconceived ideas with the action of divine grace, (d) a subsequent altering or amplification of the testimony after the revelation, and (e) errors made in good faith by those who record the testimony.”²²² Consequent upon these, the discernment of the private Revelations is a necessity in this contemporary period. The visionary’s message may contain some elements of errors. It is not wrong to say that God’s message received through vision contains errors. The visionary is still subject to human weaknesses. No divine revelation is immediately received by a visionary. It is filtered through the perceptive and faculties of the recipient. The old Latin proverb ‘that which is received is received in the manner of the receiver, comes in handy. Be that as it may, God has the power to elevate human to a level above finitude.

²¹⁹ Groeschel, *A Still, Small Voice*, 43.

²²⁰ Groeschel, 43.

²²¹ Groeschel, 47.

²²² Groeschel, 51.

Furthermore, post-biblical miracles have a significant influence on people's spiritual lives and the Church in general. Their duty is to lead to a deeper understanding and application of the public Revelation in a concrete situation. Some people have gone astray in the past because of their overconfidence in these miraculous events to the detriment of official doctrines of the Catholic faith. Sometimes, these miracles pose serious pastoral problems for the priests and bishops alike. Hence, the Church has the duty of guiding the faithful properly about private Revelations. Consequently, the Church has instituted measures to curtail aberrations, fraud, and over exaggeration in the healing centres and apparition grounds. Avery Dulles in his submission calls for prudence in the handling of private Revelations because of their inherent misrepresentation: "In view of the dangers of delusion, fraud, exaggeration, and the like, reports of private revelations should be treated with caution."²²³ The subjective character of the private Revelations limit them to a particular situation and not for public consumption without proper discernment. "The personal character of private revelations and especially the fact that they are deeply influenced by the subjectivity of the individual require that their use be very circumscribed and generally limited to the situation in which the revelation occurred."²²⁴ However, some private Revelations have national or universal consequences judging from their contents and messages.

There are mixed up in the interpretation and transmission of the Divine actions sometimes as already indicated. Hence, people are encouraged to toe the part of caution in dealing with private Revelations in line with the Church's directives. The desire for new miracles or Revelations is a challenge that keeps occurring in a pastoral arena. It is entirely out of order to do so after we have received the word of God himself. "Any person questioning God or desiring some vision or revelation would be guilty not only of foolish behaviour but also of offending him, by not fixing his eyes entirely on Christ and by living with the desire for some other novelty."²²⁵ The unnecessary craving for extraordinary events is not in line with the mind of the Church, and they are likely to lead one astray if care is not taken. Besides, Pope Francis was quoted to have said, "there is a group of Christians without Christ: those who look for rarities and curiosities that come from private revelations,' the pope said. Like the Pharisees who pestered Jesus with questions about

²²³ Dulles, "Revelation, Theology of," 198.

²²⁴ Groeschel, *A Still, Small Voice*, 33.

²²⁵ Benedict XVI, "Verbum Domini," 14.

the future, these people desired ‘the spectacle of a revelation, to experience something new.’”²²⁶

The question Jews put to Jesus is still active in our religious circle today; what sign can you give us that we may believe? (cf. John 6:30). Many people flock around healers, visionaries, and apparition centres looking for the solutions to their problems. Some want to know what the future holds in store for them or to know the ultimate meaning of reality of human existence. The search for miracles could indirectly portray some lacuna in people’s spiritual lives. Somehow, some think that miraculous actions are the best way to fill this gap in their spiritual lives. Nevertheless, the Church is resolute in her teaching about private Revelations. They are not part of the deposit of the faith in the Catholic Church and are not indispensable.

For Michael O’Neill, the repealing of canons 1399 and 2318 bolstered the news about private Revelations: “In 1966, Paul VI, implementing Vatican II’s statement on the right of the mass media to information, lifted the requirement that all writings about private revelation need ecclesiastical approval before publication, repealing canons 1399 and 2318 from the Code of Canon Law of 1917. With this change and the disappearance of the Index, the floodgates for claims of private revelation had been opened.”²²⁷

Besides, the modern innovation in the area of communication and the dissemination of information in this contemporary era have contributed immensely to the news about reported Revelations. Within the period under consideration, a lot of books, documentaries both video and audiotape, websites and blogs have helped in the disseminating the information and miraculous events. In the opinion of René Laurentin, “this more liberal view is in keeping with the Council’s restatement of Christian liberty which gives greater scope to the charisms and prophetic initiatives of the laity. However, this greater openness will only last if Christians act with discernment, moderation and obedience towards their bishops who continue duty-bound to supervise these phenomena, with the same authority and prudence as before.”²²⁸

In the contemporary period, there is a shift in the understanding of private Revelations from negative to the positive meaning. We are urged not to dismiss such with a wave of hands, but to investigate it. This encouragement is in line with the injunction of Paul to

²²⁶ Thavis, *The Vatican Prophecies*, 99.

²²⁷ O’Neil, *Exploring the Miraculous*, 45.

²²⁸ Laurentin, *The Apparitions of the Blessed Virgin Mary Today*, 5.

Thessalonians, “do not quench the Spirit, do not despise prophesying, but test everything, holding fast to what is good” (1Thess. 5:19-21). Miracles should serve as a light to enlighten the mystery of Christ who is God made man. That is why all the miracles tend towards clarifying the message of salvation brought by Jesus Christ. On the other hand, St. John tells his community, “beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God; for many false prophets have gone out into the world” (1 John 4:1). We should prudently inquire about the authenticity of the Spirit at work in every extraordinary event. The development of science and technology and implementation of Second Vatican Council’s principle on the use of media warranted the rampant news about private Revelations in this age. One should not reject reported miracles simply because he or she does not agree with the content, which is free of error. It so because, God has his way and time of doing things which are not dependent upon human wisdom.²²⁹

For some people, the presence of the sanctifying grace is a sign that the extraordinary events have taken place. This notion is not entirely correct. Sanctifying grace is the grace that makes a person dear to God. Hence, “the object of the discerning process, as it proposes to come to a judgment about the authenticity of apparitions and private revelations, is to examine precisely the evidence for signs of the miraculous. The CDF norms are concerned with the spiritual fruits as one of the signs, but these can be present without miracles. So, the signs of sanctifying graces at work are not sufficient of themselves to show that the apparitions are of heavenly origin.”²³⁰ There is no gainsaying about the role of miraculous events in the private Revelations. They help in authenticating the extraordinary events as truly from God, just as it is the case with the public Revelation. “But just as the miraculous has provided motives of credibility or invitations to a deeper or firmer faith in public revelation, so the miraculous seems to have a similar role in helping to certify private revelations that usually accompany an apparition.”²³¹

The onus lies on the local bishop begin an enquiry into alleged claims of miraculous events in his territory, and the faithful should listen to him. They are better placed to investigate about the alleged miracles because of their knowledge about spiritual reality

²²⁹ Groeschel, *A Still, Small Voice*, 88.

²³⁰ Frederick M. Jelly, “Discerning the Miraculous: Norms for Judging Apparitions and Private Revelations,” *Marian Studies* 44, no. 8 (1993): 45, http://ecommons.udayton.edu/marian_studies/vol44/iss1/8.

²³¹ Jelly, 45.

and their position in the Church. However, “let it be said at the outset that it is almost as difficult to be certain that all aspects of such an experience are false as it is to be certain that all parts of authentic experience are truly from a divine origin.”²³² Furthermore, it is noticeable that every alleged claim of miraculous event has its supporters and opponents. Some people have made up their mind about miraculous events and will not change. While others are not interested in the criticism of individuals about the alleged claim of miraculous events, for them they are Divine acts. It will be good to consider different classifications of the post-biblical miracles, having discussed the post-biblical miracles as a whole.

2.2. Types of Post-Biblical Miracles

2.2.1. Eucharistic Miracles

Eucharist is one of the seven sacraments of the Church and the summit and centre of our celebration in the Church. The Catholic Church teaches that Jesus Christ is really and truly present in the consecrated host and wine. According to *Catechism of Catholic Church*, “the Eucharist is the heart and the summit of the Church’s life, for in it Christ associates his Church and all her members with his sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving offered once for all on the cross to his Father; by this sacrifice he pours out the graces of salvation on his Body which is the Church.”²³³ This sacrament was instituted by Jesus Christ at the last supper with his disciples. However, many do not believe in the real presence of Jesus Christ in the Holy Eucharist. They said that the action of Jesus Christ is symbolic and not real. Nevertheless, the Church teaches that he is truly present; body, soul, and divinity in the Holy Eucharist. It is good to remind people that our faith is not based on the miracles of the Eucharist but on the person who instituted it, Jesus Christ. “We must remember above all that our faith in the Eucharist is not based on Eucharistic miracles, but on Christ the Lord, who during his preaching pre-announced the Eucharist and later instituted it, when celebrating the Last Supper with his apostles, on Holy Thursday, before his passion and death on Good Friday.”²³⁴ Miraculous events help to strengthen our faith in the originator, Jesus Christ. In the Words of Joan Carroll Cruz, “his children, on the other hand, have not always appreciated this presence and, as painful as it is to consider, many have abused the gift by receiving it unworthily, by doubting the

²³² Groeschel, *A Still, Small Voice*, 71.

²³³ CCC, 1407.

²³⁴ Raffaello Martinelli, “Exhibition Focuses on Eucharistic Miracles,” interview by Zenit staff, *Zenit.org*, (Rome: October 17, 2005), <https://zenit.org/articles/exhibition-focuses-on-eucharistic-miracles/>.

Real Presence of God in the sacred Host, or by treating the Sacrament with indifference. For these reasons the saviour has seen fit at times to prove His presence by performing Eucharistic miracles of various kinds.”²³⁵ Most miracles in this regard have authenticated the teaching of the Catholic Church about Eucharist; thereby letting people know that it is real Body and Blood of Christ.

Transubstantiation is a term used in describing what happens during consecration of bread and wine. After the prayer of consecration bread and wine turn into Body and Blood of Christ. Transubstantiation is not a miracle per se, but a mystery which is not under the purview of this research. Hence, the Eucharistic miracle is not what happens during consecration but after it. Many Eucharistic miracles have taken place in the history of the Church, and these events are perceptible to the senses. These events go a long way in substantiating the credibility of the Real Presence of Jesus Christ in the Holy Eucharist. These extraordinary events come in different manners to prove the teaching of the Church about the Eucharist. “Perhaps the most convincing are the cases in which the consecrated wafer, commonly known as the host, has been transformed into human flesh. Other times the Eucharist has been seen to bleed human blood as verified by scientific testing. Other consecrated hosts have been inexplicably preserved for hundreds of years or have fortuitously escaped danger by passing through a fire unscathed or vanishing from the clutches of thieves.”²³⁶

There are many Eucharistic miracles in the medieval period that are still relevant in this contemporary era, perhaps, because of their prodigious nature. One of such miraculous events is the one that took place in Lanciano, Italy, around the year 700 AD. In this instance, a ring of human flesh and globules of human blood were discovered to have formed in the species after the consecration. These phenomena have undergone several scientific investigations. The last one was carried out in 1971, by Odoardo Linoli, professor emeritus in human anatomy at the University of Siena, with the assistance of Ruggero Bertelli, a retired professor of human anatomy, pathological histology, chemistry, and clinical microscopy at the University of Siena. They found out that the flesh was a human striated muscular tissue of a heart wall without any preservative. The blood was discovered to be that of human being belonging to the group of AB.²³⁷

²³⁵ Joan Carroll Cruz, *Eucharistic Miracles* (Charlotte: Tan, 1987), ix.

²³⁶ O'Neill, *Exploring the Miraculous*, 168.

²³⁷ O'Neill, 168-169.

In recent past, the Archbishop of the Archdiocese of Trivandrum, in India approved Eucharistic miracles that occurred in one of the parishes in his archdiocese. On April 28, 2001, in the Malankara Catholic Church in Chirattakonam, India, the faithful and their parish priest noticed some unusual formation on the Holy Eucharist during their adoration. After one week the parish priest could make out the face of a bearded man on the Holy Eucharist where he reserved it in the tabernacle. With time the image was so clear such that even the local bishop accepted it as miraculous and encouraged prayers for the manifestation of the true meaning of the sign for the faithful.²³⁸

More still, in 2016, Bishop Zbigniew Kiernikowski of Legnica, Poland approved the veneration of the Eucharistic miracle that took place in one of the parishes. It all started on Christmas Day in 2013, a consecrated host fell on the floor and was put in a container of water. Afterwards, red stains appeared on the host. He, the bishop, commissioned a team of scientists to investigate and analyse the phenomena later. The team carried out their investigation in two different institutions in Poland and came up with the result of their findings. Accordingly, these “tests were performed at the Department of Forensic Medicine in Wroclaw at the beginning of 2014. Another study was subsequently conducted by the Department of Forensic Medicine of the Pomeranian Medical University in Szczecin, which concluded that ‘in the histopathological image, the fragments (of the Host) were found containing the fragmented parts of the cross striated muscle. It is most similar to the heart muscle. Tests also determined the tissue to be of human origin, and found that it bore signs of distress.’”²³⁹

According to Catholic Herald, “Bishop Kiernikowski said the Host bore signs of ‘a Eucharistic miracle’ and explained that in January of this year (2016 *added by me*) he took the matter to the Vatican’s Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith. In April, according to a recommendation made by the Holy See, he asked parish priest Andrzej Ziombrze ‘to prepare a suitable place’ for the Host so that the faithful could venerate it. ‘I hope that this will serve to deepen the cult of the Eucharist and will have deep impact on the lives of people facing the Host.’”²⁴⁰

²³⁸ O’Neill, 171-172.

²³⁹ Staff Reporter, “Bleeding Host in Poland ‘has Hallmarks of a Eucharistic Miracle,” *Catholic Herald*, (April 16, 2016), <http://www.catholicherald.co.uk/news/2016/04/19/bleeding-host-in-poland-has-hallmarks-of-a-eucharistic-miracle/>.

²⁴⁰ Staff Reporter, “Bleeding Host in Poland ‘has Hallmarks of a Eucharistic Miracle.”

Finally, the real aim of the Eucharistic miracle is to strengthen the faith of the faithful in the sacrament of Holy Eucharist, especially in the Real Presence of Christ. There are many unverified Eucharistic miracles out there making news daily which are not considered here for the lack of data. The more pronounced miracle in the world today is that of healing. Health is what can move people so easily because it touches everyone directly.

2.2.2. Healings (Medical Miracles)

In the words of John Okoye, “Jesus was careful to associate his disciples with his healing ministry. He communicated to them the power to heal and cast out demons in his name, and he sent them forth with authority in the Spirit to forgive sins.”²⁴¹ The power given to the disciples is still active in the Church today. Healing miracles tend to be more in numbers than any other miraculous events in the world. The reason may not be far-fetched; the answer is obvious when one considers what healthy living means to people. “Healing is so sought for because it involves the immediate human condition which is life threatened most often. That is why it is prominent among the miracles being sought for by people. They want to be freed from maladies of this world and live healthily.”²⁴² Even in the Bible, the number of healings is higher than any other wonderful works of Christ. When one considers exorcisms as part of healings, the enormous number of healing miracles could be imagined better.

Equally, the place of healing cannot be underestimated in the Church’s practice all through her history. The Church has the anointing of the sick as one of her sacraments. Anointing of the sick takes care of those who are sick physically and spiritually. It is a sacrament through which the Church asks God to heal the sick and restore their health. In this sacrament, the Church prays for the spiritual and physical healing of the sick which is in line with the healing works of Christ. He healed both body and soul. Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger reiterated this position when said, “Not only is it praiseworthy for individual members of the faithful to ask for healing for themselves and for others, but the Church herself asks the Lord for the health of the sick in her liturgy.”²⁴³ The healings in the contemporary period are still the work of Christ through his disciples. “The Fathers of the

²⁴¹ Okoye, *Biblical and Pastoral Reflection on the Catholic Charismatic Renewal*, 23.

²⁴² Metaxas, *Miracles*, 31.

²⁴³ Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, “Instruction on Prayers for Healing,” (hereafter IPH), (September 14, 2000): no. 2,

http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_20001123_istruzzi_en.html.

Church considered it normal that believers would ask God not only for the health of their soul, but also for that of their body.”²⁴⁴ In as much as one cannot separate the relationship between mind and body, the research is, however, constrained by the scope of the work to physical healings only.

Both believers and non-believers “all agree that for a cure to be a miracle the disease must be organic in nature.”²⁴⁵ Health is important to human beings, and they desire healthy living in all its ramifications. When one has done their bit, one believes that God will do the rest. “Presuming the acceptance of God’s will, the sick person’s desire for healing is both good and deeply human, especially when it takes the form of a trusting prayer addressed to God.”²⁴⁶ Be that as it may, healing does not entail abandoning the natural way of healing: “Obviously, recourse to prayer does not exclude, but rather encourages the use of effective natural means for preserving and restoring health, as well as leading the Church’s sons and daughters to care for the sick, to assist them in body and spirit, and to seek to cure disease.”²⁴⁷

Healing miracles may not mean the same thing to different people because of their religious background. Since the dominant characteristic of miracles is its sign-function for a particular subject, it follows that a healing miracle need not be equally meaningful for everyone. A religious person may regard his or her healing as a miracle notwithstanding other people’s view.²⁴⁸ The intention of a miracle makes the understanding of healing better, in the sense that one sees what has happened to them as an act of God.

The question people should ask themselves is, what does healing mean to me? It is true one may have experienced physical healing, but it does not end there. Lisa J. Schwebel says that “the characteristic that makes an event genuinely “of God” is not that it contradicts nature, but rather, that it calls into question and radically transforms the meaning of a person’s whole existence, and not merely her biological or material existence.”²⁴⁹ That is considering the intentional aspect of miracles: the purpose and meaning of the miraculous events. It is appropriate to draw our attention towards the

²⁴⁴ IPH, 4.

²⁴⁵ Schwebel, *Apparitions, Healings and Weeping Madonnas*, 131.

²⁴⁶ IPH, 2.

²⁴⁷ IPH, 2.

²⁴⁸ Schwebel, *Apparitions, Healings and Weeping Madonnas*, 166.

²⁴⁹ Schwebel, 166.

purpose of healing in the life of a believer, not minding our differences which make room for the different levels of appreciation. Here, we are not so much eager to know how it happened rather, to know the purpose of the healing. Lisa J. Schwebel reiterates the position of the contemporary Catholic theologians, when she says, “by placing the emphases on the purpose and meaning rather than on the biological processes, we redirect the popular, and to some extent theological, debate on healing miracles. It is no longer a debate over which case count. The discussion can then focus more properly on the relation between God and world, particularly on the relation of the believing person and God.”²⁵⁰ Some people see their healing as an opportunity to deepen their relationship with God through service. For the contemporary people, their interest is in the meaning of healings in their relationship with God in this world and the world to come. This perspective presents the correct way to view healings and so clarifies why people behave the way they do.

On the contrary, there are some doubts about the authenticity of healings by those who are philosophically and scientifically minded. Michael O'Neill listed some of the institutions that have conducted some research on the effects of faith on the sick in his book, *Exploring the Miraculous*. According to him, the results from the following institutions: Duke University, Fordham University, Agnes Scott College, the Institute for Psychobiological Research (London), and UCLA, have shown that prayers have positive effects on the sick.²⁵¹ The effects of prayers on the sick are not limited to the sick's prayer but also when others pray for them. It is true that some of the healings have medical and psychological explanations, but these do not remove the fact that there are healing miracles. There are genuine healings which remained unexplainable by these group of people mentioned.

Many people are known to have received healings through the intercession of many saints and individuals alike. It would be wrong to think that only the saints have the gift of healing. However, the healings received through the intercession of saints attract much publicity and respect because of who they are and what they represent. Some sick people do travel to different healing centres and tombs of these holy men and women in search of a cure for their ailments. On the other hand, some stay at home praying for healing.

²⁵⁰ Schwebel, 167.

²⁵¹ O'Neill, *Exploring the Miraculous*, 78.

Prayer is the vehicle through which one receives healing through the saints and would-be saints. Sometimes, other rituals are included as well in the process of intercession. In the case of emergency, only prayers are what is obtainable. The prayer of healing like every other prayer ought to be sincere. In the opinion of Jacalyn Duffin, “the depositions make it clear that the prayer had to be especially sincere and given with value-added devotion, whether in a crisis or not. Not just any prayer would do; quality counted, too, as if the hoped-for favor relies on the prior miracles of faith.”²⁵² It is a prayer on purpose with every trust to almighty God. Sometimes, prayers imploring for healing come with some promises to fulfil, if the request is granted. The promise may be material or spiritual depending on the person’s decision.

Some healings are attributed to visits to tombs of saints and would-be saints, praying with their relics, and wearing a sacred object of saints or would-be saints. Some will do a novena to invoke the saints’ intercession, which is a nine-day consecutive prayer address directly to God or through the saints to God. Be that as it may, we are cautioned about the superstitious and magical use of that by Prospero Lambertini as highlighted by Jacalyn Duffin. There is nothing so peculiar about a novena; God hears prayers at his own will. God’s response to our request does not depend on a number of days, weeks or months.²⁵³ Most often, friends and relatives invoke God and saints in behalf of their people. This invocation is especially when they are unable to help themselves because of their condition.

Equally, some of the shrines dedicated to the apparition of Blessed Virgin Mary have become centres for those who seek healing. These apparition centres are well known in the contemporary period, and there is news of alleged healings on a daily basis from these centres. Each year millions of pilgrims visit these shrines of Our Lady located in the different parts of the world in search of healing. The pilgrimage is not limited only to officially recognised apparition centres, but also yet to be approved centres. These include shrines of Our Lady of Guadalupe in Mexico, Medjugorje in Bosnia- Herzegovina, Our Lady of Fatima in Portugal, Our Lady of Lourdes in France, and the rest.

The shrine of Our Lady of Lourdes is the most famous of all the shrines of Blessed Virgin Mary regarding the reported healings. The shrine was built in memory of the apparition

²⁵² Jacalyn Duffin, *Medical Miracle: Doctors, Saints and Healing in the Modern World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 147.

²⁵³ Duffin, 162.

of Our Lady to Bernadette Soubirous in 1858. “During an apparition on February 25, the Virgin described the location of a healing spring and instructed Bernadette to dig in the mud, revealing the underground water source. Since that time millions of pilgrims have gone to Lourdes and followed the instruction of Our Lady of Lourdes to ‘drink at the spring and wash in it.’ There have been thousands of medically inexplicable cures recorded, but very few have been validated.”²⁵⁴ Of all the healing centres, Lourdes is the only place that has medical commission called International Lourdes Medical Committee. Their duty is to verify all the alleged healing claims emanating from the shrine strictly by the laid down procedures. The medical personnel are selected to serve on the commission for a short period to minimise biases. According to Michael O’Neill, “the process of verification is extremely stringent, allowing only the most authentic and indisputable miracles to pass the standards of approval. The cures must be proven to be instantaneous, complete, and lasting and not product of medical intervention.”²⁵⁵

It is worth noting that it is not the duty of the medical personnel to declare a healing miraculous, rather their duty is to judge if a healing is explainable or unexplainable. The Church hierarchy and theologians have the authority of declaring an event miraculous. As of today, sixty-ninth healings have officially been certified by the medical commission in Lourdes. The last person to be certified as healed was the Danila Castelli from Italy who visited the shrine in, 1989, because of her numerous health challenges. She received instant healing after her bath in the spring and reported the healing to the medical bureau for certification. Msgr. Giovanni Giudici, Bishop of Pavia, her diocese declared this healing miraculous on 20th of June, 2013.²⁵⁶

In the process of canonization, healing miracles have the upper hand than any other miracles, if at all they are considered. In other words, healing miracles are significant in the canonization process in the Catholic Church especially today. Jacalyn Duffin in her research in the Vatican archive says, “I learned that healings were indeed the most frequent form of miracle in the canonization process of the past four centuries, and that they are increasing.”²⁵⁷ Healings claimed to have been received through the intercession of would-be saints are subjected to rigorous and strict procedures before they are accepted as authentic or rejected. The process reflects the current reality on the ground about

²⁵⁴ O’Neill, *Exploring the Miraculous*, 79.

²⁵⁵ O’Neill, 79.

²⁵⁶ O’Neill, 80.

²⁵⁷ Duffin, *Medical Miracle*, 72.

medical science and treatment. The rigorous procedure is to confirm the person's new state in life. Let it be on record that healing of the illness is not a guarantee of eternal life; rather, it is death postponed. In the words of Jacalyn Duffin, it is "far from conveying immortality, a miracle cure is tied to recovery from a specific illness."²⁵⁸ Hence, the probability that the person may still die of another sickness should not be seen as a relapse of the healed ailment.

Appreciations do follow the healing miracles in the life of a Christian. People use different means in thanking God, and the saints for the healing granted to them. Those who made promises will gladly fulfil what they have pledged. Some people would commit themselves more to the service of God and humanity in appreciation for the favours received. The methods of appreciation are not limited to the ones mentioned here but go beyond them depending on the person involved.

According to the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, "prayer for the restoration of health is therefore part of the Church's experience in every age, including our own. What in some ways is new is the proliferation of prayer meetings, at times combined with liturgical celebrations, for the purpose of obtaining healing from God. In many cases, the occurrence of healings has been proclaimed, giving rise to the expectation of the same phenomenon in other such gatherings. In the same context, appeal is sometimes made to a claimed charism of healing."²⁵⁹ The Church has issued a guideline about the practice of healing to correct anomalies noticed. There is no gainsaying about the fact of the practice of healing as stated therein, but the problem is the approach in recent times. In the contemporary period, the pastoral challenges arising from the healing practices by the healers are enormous. In line with this John Okoye says, "there are, however, several pastoral problems engendered by this gift of healing and the practice of exorcism, some of which are: the often heard statement that God is good and will have to eliminate all sickness and sufferings; the polarisation of the overall ministry of the Church with the healing ministry; the pre-occupation with the demon in healing; the possible money-motivated healing ministry; the healing procedure overburdened with superstition."²⁶⁰

There is this wrong assumption among some Christians that God will heal anyone instantly who petitions him in faith. For such people, God desires our physical well-being

²⁵⁸ Duffin, 67.

²⁵⁹ IPH, 'Introduction.'

²⁶⁰ Okoye, *Biblical and Pastoral Reflection on the Catholic Charismatic Renewal*, 24.

and will not allow us to suffer at all. This idea is unbiblical and against the teachings and practice of the Church. According to John Okoye, “an average Nigerian Christian wants an immediate positive response from God to take away his misfortunes. A quick and instant recovery vindicates for him the presence of God. Where and when this instant result is delayed, this Christian God is pronounced impotent and no right-thinking fellow can be reckless to the point of hanging unto a useless God. Exploiting this sentiment, some of our priests create the impression that nobody comes to them without instantaneous positive answer to all his problems.”²⁶¹ In fact, the way some people go about the issue of healing ministry gives the impression of individuals who have God under their control. This impression is another form of a magical exhibition in another cloak. The understanding is false teaching and practice devoid of a true Catholic tradition. Real Christian healing has its full meaning in the Christ-event.

Miracle is an aid to faith and not the cause of faith. Hence, healings depend on God’s love and not necessarily on the faith. “Moreover it produces the wrong belief that God’s healing power is dependent on faith of which unless we produce a certain amount God will not be capable to heal us.”²⁶² This idea is a wrong understanding of the relationship between faith and healing of which Catholic Bishops Conference of Nigeria highlighted in the *Guidelines for the Healing Ministry in the Catholic Church in Nigeria*. According to the guideline, “healing is not a reward for faith but an expressed gratuitous will of God. Faith that is required for healing is the same with which the individual believes in the Word of God and the Sacraments.”²⁶³

The Church frowns at what she calls charism of healing whereby the person with the grace of healing determines what would be the outcome of a prayer session. “A possible ‘charism of healing’ can be attributed when the intervention of a specific person or persons, or a specific category of persons (for example, the directors of the group that promotes the meetings) is viewed as determinative for the efficacy of the prayer.”²⁶⁴ There is no particular group of people endowed with the charism of healing. It is given to individuals according to the will of the Spirit who is active in the Church. “We have a liturgical and non-liturgical prayer of healing in the Church. Prayers for healing are

²⁶¹ Okoye, 25.

²⁶² Okoye, 26.

²⁶³ The Catholic Bishops’ Conference of Nigerian, *Guidelines for the Healing Ministry in the Catholic Church in Nigeria* (Lagos: Catholic Secretariat of Nigeria, 1997), 9.

²⁶⁴ IPH, 5.

considered to be liturgical if they are part of the liturgical books approved by the Church's competent authority; otherwise, they are non-liturgical.”²⁶⁵ Healing gift is meant for the community of believers and should be used as such. It is not for personal gain as many contemporary healers are doing. Fredrick Mbiere while discussing the prevalence of healing for personal gains says “we may note as well that today this type of healing is highly in vogue in the healing ministry centres in the Church, among Charismatic Renewal.”²⁶⁶ It is the wish of the Lord that the gift of healing should be used for the commonweal. “In sending out the seventy-two disciples, the Lord charges them: ‘cure the sick’ (Lk 10:9). The power to heal, therefore, is given within a missionary context, not for their own exaltation, but to confirm their mission.”²⁶⁷

As a result of abnormal practices noticed in the healing ministries, the Church directed the conference of the bishops and diocesan bishops to do the needful in sanitising the situation. The disciplinary norms are in the “Instruction on Prayers for Healing” of Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith. In fact, the diocesan bishops have major work in ensuring that proper decorum and guideline are maintained be it in non-liturgical or liturgical healing prayers. This warning reemphasised the stand of Catholic Bishops’ Conference of Nigeria, who has stated how those involved in healing ministry should go about it. They cautioned people against advertising the healing activities in such a way as to attract undue attention to the ‘priest or lay’ healer. Besides, they warned that healing ministry should not be a means of making money or acquiring material gains.²⁶⁸ Healing ministry should not lose focus on its main objective: restoration of peoples’ health through the mercy of God. In this contemporary period, those who are at the helm of the affairs of the Church are encouraged to subject the healing gifts to discernment and regulation for better building of the Church. More attention should be given to alleged claims of healing from apparition centres because of their prevalence in this contemporary period.

2.2.3. Apparitions

According to Michael O’Neill, “apparitions are perhaps the most unique and controversial of all miracles. They are supernatural, corporeal appearances of Jesus, the Virgin Mary, or saints to one or more persons. Typically they are accompanied by messages for the

²⁶⁵ IPH, 5.

²⁶⁶ Mbiere, *Healing Ministry in Nigeria*, 184.

²⁶⁷ IPH, 3.

²⁶⁸ The Catholic Bishops’ Conference of Nigerian, *Guidelines for the Healing Ministry in the Catholic Church in Nigeria*, 19, 23.

faithful, at times just for the witnesses themselves but in most other cases for a larger audience –the local community, the country, or the universal Church.”²⁶⁹ The meaning of apparitions especially in our present day situation is necessary, because of the high rate of the alleged Marian apparitions. An authentic apparition is not hallucination or illusion which may be caused by sickness or mental illness. Fredrick Jelly argues that “an authentic vision is a charism or a charismatic *grace-gratia gratis data*. These charismatic graces are given to an individual or a group primarily for the spiritual good of others or for the Church as a whole.”²⁷⁰ Hence, this should not be construed as a grace that will make one holy. Consequently, “apparitions are not to be confused with the divine enlightenment of the gifts of the Holy Spirit-*gratia gratum faciens* (grace which makes one holy or pleasing before God). These latter are bestowed on the individual for the sake of transforming union with the triune God through Jesus Christ.”²⁷¹

There is need to differentiate between vision and apparition here because of people’s penchant to confuse the two. Apparition is a vision that is unanticipated by the individual, while in vision the individual wishes to see a supernatural being. “A vision is generally understood as a private experience that results from a process of intense spiritual effort, reflecting, in a sense, a desire to see the supernatural. An apparition typically arrives unexpectedly, without warning, to people who are often spiritually unprepared to deal with it,”²⁷² so says John Thavis.

Even though, apparitions are in public domain, they are a personal relationship between the seer and Divine reality. This fact explains the reason while only the seer does see and communicate with the Divine being most often during the apparition. Nevertheless, most people do not understand that the event does not take place in the actual material world, preferably in the mind of the visionary.²⁷³ In other words, Mary is not physically present in the centres, but she is in the mind of the visionary. It is through special grace of God that Bernadette at Lourdes was able to apprehend the vision of Madonna. Madonna was not really in the grotto physically but was in her mind.²⁷⁴ This reason sheds light on the inability of others to see what the visionary is seeing at that particular point in time. Furthermore, there is a need to remember the human aspect of an apparition. An

²⁶⁹ O’Neill, *Exploring the Miraculous*, 120.

²⁷⁰ Jelly, “Discerning the Miraculous,” 42.

²⁷¹ Jelly, 43.

²⁷² Thavis, *The Vatican Prophecies*, 81.

²⁷³ Thavis, 81.

²⁷⁴ Thavis, 81.

apparition is an extraordinary action no doubt, but the messages are relayed in a human language. It then means that the message somehow depends on the ability and capacity of the visionary to pass it correctly. Therefore we should bear this condition in mind, “in order to avoid imbalance on the either side we have to understand clearly not only the values of these extraordinary manifestations of the supernatural, but also their limitations. In many ways apparitions are an ambivalent phenomenon. Two important considerations have to be constantly borne in mind: apparitions are adapted to the visionaries and visionaries perceive them according to their own capacity.”²⁷⁵ An apparition is a communication from heaven to humanity, which does not necessarily bestow beatific vision and sanctifying grace. The Divine reality in the vision adapts to the visionary’s culture and language. Moreover, his or her cultural values colour their narrations here and there.

Apparitions of Blessed Virgin Mary are the highest and the most vibrant of all miracles in recent times. Many people claim to have received healing through the intercession of Blessed Virgin Mary in different apparition grounds. The most noticeable is that of Lourdes in France for which there exists a medical tribunal to help in verifying the alleged claims of healing. Marian apparition centres are known by the principal topic of the message, like Our Lady of Sorrow and Our Lady of Miraculous Medal or by the name of the town like Our Lady of Fatima and Our Lady of Lourdes. The current spate of apparitions has something to remind us about Revelation. The Revelation though came to a close with the death of the last apostle is still active in our lives. In the words of Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, “they show among other things, that Revelation—still unique, concluded and therefore unsurpassable—is not yet a dead thing but something alive and vital.”²⁷⁶ In recent times, the apparition of the Blessed Virgin Mary is on the increase. Some people do not believe in this reality and consider it as a sign of sickness, perhaps mental problems. René Laurentin, the foremost mariologist, articulated very well some people’s stance on the current spate of apparitions. According to him, “this proliferation of apparitions is a psycho-sociological phenomenon and is no doubt pathological. The wisest thing is to ignore the phenomenon, put it to one side, as indeed the Church has

²⁷⁵ Laurentin, *The Apparitions of the Blessed Virgin Mary Today*, 31.

²⁷⁶ Ratzinger, *The Ratzinger Report*, 111.

done.”²⁷⁷ This explanation may not have said it all; there are other reasons that warranted this spate of apparitions in the contemporary period.

First, Second Vatican Council’s decision to lift the ban on the publication of private Revelations, as against the Code of Canon Law 1917, which forbade publication of miracles and apparitions without the approval of the local bishop, is helping the new trend we see today. “The Code of Canon Law of 1917 (1399, #5) forbade the publication of anything about ‘new apparitions, revelations, visions, prophecies, and miracles’ without the local bishop’s approbation. In 1969, Paul VI, implementing the Vatican II’s statement on the right of the mass media to information, lifted the requirement that all writings about apparitions needed ecclesiastical approval before publication.”²⁷⁸

Second, as a result of the lifting of the embargo on the publication of private Revelations, today there is news of apparitions almost on a weekly or monthly basis. Modern means of communication is another factor that facilitates the news about apparitions in this contemporary age. In fact, we are experiencing media hype of reported apparitions in the modern period. The Church acknowledges this reality, and she encourages the relevant authorities to be ready for the challenges that will follow such events. “Today, more than in the past, news of these apparitions is diffused rapidly among the faithful thanks to the means of information (*mass media*). Moreover, the ease of going from one place to another fosters frequent pilgrimages, so that Ecclesiastical Authority should discern quickly about the merits of such matters.”²⁷⁹ Millions of pilgrims visit different apparitions ground all over the world due to the faster means of transportation unlike before. The pilgrimage includes all the approved apparition grounds and non-approved. Annually ten million pilgrims visit Mexico to venerate Our Lady of Guadalupe, five and four million visit Lourdes in France, and Fatima, Portugal respectively. Medjugorje in Bosnia-Herzegovina since its inception in 1981 has received millions of pilgrims from all over the world. The magnitude of pilgrims demonstrates the influence of miraculous events in our lives as Christians. Such numbers seem to indicate that the miracles continue

²⁷⁷ Laurentin, *The Apparitions of the Blessed Virgin Mary Today*, 9.

²⁷⁸ University of Dayton, “Apparitions in the News” *Marian Library Newsletter*, (Spring 1997): 3, http://ecommons.udayton.edu/ml_newsletter/17.

²⁷⁹ Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, “Norms Regarding the Manner of Proceeding in the Discernment of Presumed Apparitions or Revelations,” (1978): no. 1, http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_19780225_norme-apparizioni_en.html.

to play an active role in the life of the Church.²⁸⁰ On the other hand, the data manifest how curious people are about the extraordinary reality in recent times.

Third, Rene Laurentin has articulated some reasons why there is a spate of apparitions in the contemporary period. According to him, perhaps it is a transitory phenomenon of our complex times? Necromancers, clairvoyants, fortune tellers and alternative medicines are enjoying unprecedented popularity. Perhaps the increasing number of apparitions ought to be seen as part of this spontaneous wave, and so, deserves caution and prudence.²⁸¹ “Moreover, the arms race, ‘the balance of fear’, creates an apocalyptic climate.”²⁸² Hence, the current situation in the world filled with fear and armament by different nations is interpreted by some as the end of the world. Therefore, apparitions seem to point towards the end of the world and urgency to be ready. Apparitions serve as signs of the end of the world from this perspective.

Fourth, some people thought that the scientific and technological mindset of this period would have reduced the tempo of supernatural, but it was not so. Therefore, “they are beginning to understand that science does not resolve and will never resolve all the problems of life. They look elsewhere. Hence, there is a religious revival which, alas, is not the result of a revival of faith. Our times are marked by a new curiosity about religion without a sufficient basis in faith.”²⁸³

If one is looking for a perfect apparition, then none of the apparitions will pass the test. The adage *bonum ex quacumque causa, malum ex quocumque defectu* (a thing is good when all of it is good, bad if there is the slightest defect), illustrate what some people want to see. Be that as it may, apparitions are not central to faith but an aid to faith. They help in boosting people’s spiritual life and ought to be seen as such. According to René Laurentin, “special signs from heaven must remain peripheral. But they do act as a stimulus and, sometimes against the odds, they bear fruits.”²⁸⁴ This research is more interested in apparitions that have far-reaching consequences on the lives of people more than the individual ones. Many people claimed to have seen a vision of Jesus, Blessed Virgin Mary, and saints that warranted a change in their lives styles. This kind of vision no doubt is possible within the personal encounter. It is a personal experience, and nobody

²⁸⁰ O’Neill, *Exploring the Miraculous*, 27.

²⁸¹ Laurentin, *The Apparitions of the Blessed Virgin Mary Today*, 14.

²⁸² Laurentin, 14.

²⁸³ Laurentin, 14.

²⁸⁴ Laurentin, 113.

has got the power to tell the person that it is not true. The person probably may have encountered a being who influenced him or her. Many saints like John Bosco, Francis of Assisi, and others, had such an everlasting experience that changed their lives completely. On the other hand, the authenticity of the messages of apparitions when addressed to a community of believers is necessary.

Most often than not there is a message that accompanies apparitions for the people, which is related to their spiritual upliftment and well-being. Some individuals who follow Marian apparitions, especially the uneducated, think Mary is omnipotent. For this reason, it is important to intervene at the appropriate time, because delaying may spell doom for the Church and the people with little knowledge of teachings of the Church. Equally, some apparitions may come with secret messages and information for the Church or the whole world. The issue of secret messages has been a recurrent decimal about Marian apparitions for a while. Take for instance the issue of Medjugorje and the controversies surrounding it. “The most controversial apparition in the history of the Church has occurred in the small town of Medjugorje in Bosnia-Herzegovina and centers on the ten mysterious secrets promised to the six seers who were recipients of daily visions.”²⁸⁵ These secret messages have always raised some challenges, especially their content. In the present age, we have Medjugorje apparition with secret messages which is causing many debates among the hierarchies of the Church and theologians. In recent times, Pope Francis was quoted as saying, “concerning the alleged current apparitions, the report expresses doubts,” he said. Furthermore, ‘personally, I am more ‘mischievous.’ I prefer Our Lady to be a mother, our mother, and not a telegraph operator who sends out a message every day at a certain time - this is not the mother of Jesus.”²⁸⁶ The position of Pope Francis is in tandem with the view of the local bishop and that of the Yugoslavian Bishops Commission. Though, they did not condemn the apparition but have some reservations about the event. Pope Benedict XVI in 2010, has constituted a commission of inquiry to investigate the claims of the Medjugorje seers. This commission is composed of theologians, psychologists, and mariologists, they have since finished their investigation, and the report is not yet out. Nevertheless, some have raised some

²⁸⁵ O'Neill, *Exploring the Miraculous*, 128.

²⁸⁶ Cindy Wooden, “Commission reportedly thought first seven Medjugorje visions were real,” *Crux*, (May 17, 2017), <https://cruxnow.com/vatican/2017/05/17/commission-reportedly-thought-first-seven-medjugorje-visions-real/>.

objections to the commission's work, because of the ongoing apparition as claimed by the visionaries.

The critics of the Medjugorje harp on what Mirjana said about the eighth secret, that it frightens her so much to the extent that she has to pray for mercy on the humanity and in response, Mary softens the punishment. For the critics, this is enough reason to reject what is happening in the Medjugorje. They said that it is not possible for Mary to be temperamental and to change her mind so easily at the exchange of prayers.²⁸⁷ It is interesting to note some spectacular happenings about Medjugorje, which have compounded the doubt exhibited by people already. It is on record that the seers have different times for the vision of the Blessed Virgin Mary now. Some receive the message on a daily basis, while others do on special occasions. Furthermore, some of them now have the experience at home and others on the blue cross. These are things making it hard for someone to accept the reality of what is happening there. The general message of apparitions is prayers and penance quite normal. On the contrary, the main problem with apparitions is the content of the messages meant for the community. Some of these messages are the source of the controversies about apparitions. "It is in this element of private revelation where the potential controversy lies—Church leaders and faithful must determine how they should respond to the instructions, prophecy, and warning in the content of the messages."²⁸⁸

Most often than not, these messages were given under historical context. Therefore, for a proper understanding of these messages, one needs to apprehend the context. "The words spoken by Our Lady at Lourdes were said in the context of a very complex historical situation and an understanding of her message required an unimpeachable appreciation of that situation."²⁸⁹ The alleged secret messages given to the visionaries about the future events, may not turn out as predicted because they are not Gospel truth. The visionaries can make a mistake in the comprehension and transmission of their experiences. "The 'secret' messages are somewhat problematic. They may well prove a disappointment because even the saints were mistaken in matters of prediction. It would be imprudent to accept these 'secrets' as gospel."²⁹⁰ The level of education and exposure to spiritual

²⁸⁷ Thavis, *The Vatican Prophecies*, 58.

²⁸⁸ O'Neil, *Exploring the Miraculous*, 120.

²⁸⁹ Laurentin, *The Apparitions of the Blessed Virgin Mary Today*, 10.

²⁹⁰ Laurentin, 84.

realities could explain such faulty information. Hence, the message is received according to the ability of the receiver.

There are two types of messages with their corresponding functions according to René Laurentin. “The permanent function is to reawaken faith and to bring about a return to God, to prayer and to fasting. It is a return to the introductory chapters of the gospel, to the preaching of John the Baptist for conversion and the baptism of repentance.”²⁹¹ This message is a reoccurring decimal. The second type has different degrees of prophetic impact of the first kind of message. For instance, in 1531 Our Lady of Guadalupe made it known that there is no difference between Spaniards and an Indian before God. Hence, she chose an India to take a message from heaven to a bishop. Lourdes came with the message that reawakened the value of evangelical poverty. During that time money was a god and everything depended on it. The material wealth one had accumulated determined the Person’s worth in the world.²⁹²

Moreover, is there anything new about contemporary apparitions’ message? No, it is still the same message of repentance. René Laurentin answers the question thus, “like previous apparitions those of today are at one and the same time a prophetic message and an evangelical response.”²⁹³ It is a call to return to God after it seems the world abandoned him with the scientific revolution of eighteenth century. The world had hoped that with the scientific knowledge, the problems of humanity would be sorted out finally. Unfortunately, it is not the case. “Thus, present-day apparitions do nothing more than underline the parlous state of our world and the urgent necessity of returning to God and to the key concepts of the gospel.”²⁹⁴ On a serious note, these apparitions remind us of the immanence of God through Jesus Christ and his Mother and the saints. “On a deeper level, these messages and the apparitions themselves remind us that God is present, that he himself is close to us through his Mother, his angels, and his saints who are his friends and his servants.”²⁹⁵

There is need to clarify the import of some messages and their promises for a proper appreciation of their values. Some private Revelations contain promises of salvation for those who are faithful to the messages. Instances of these are the promises to those who

²⁹¹ Laurentin, 121.

²⁹² Laurentin, 121-122.

²⁹³ Laurentin, 123.

²⁹⁴ Laurentin, 124.

²⁹⁵ Laurentin, 128.

wear the scapular and to those who observe the first Friday in honour of the Sacred Heart. In the words of René Laurentin, the promises are quite true but not at the expense of already stated means of salvation. “Those who faithfully fulfil these promises are assured of salvation. These promises can never be understood outside the general context of Scripture and sacred Tradition. It is generally recognized by the devout that those who observe these promises must also observe the gospel and the teaching of the Church.”²⁹⁶ It does not mean that the person would find salvation only by keeping the promises of the vision or apparition. It must go hand in hand with the already stated means of salvation outlined by the Church.

The purpose of all these Marian apparitions is to manifest the maternal love of Mary, the mother of the Church. Ralph M. McInerney opined that “if one had to select a single reason for all these apparitions it would be maternal warning, maternal concern, maternal reminding of what is demanded of us as Christians.”²⁹⁷ Marian apparitions intend to call us back to the faith in Jesus Christ our Lord. “Marian apparitions have as purpose to deepen our faith in the Gospel. Apparitions call us to a life of prayer, to the practice of penance, to the reception of the sacraments. In her apparitions, Mary calls us to renewed faith in the Gospels and the apostolic deposit of faith; she calls us to hear and ponder the Word of God in our hearts.”²⁹⁸ Pope Francis in his homily during the centenary celebration of Fatima apparition and canonization of Jacinta and Francisco Marto, reminded the people the aim of the apparition of Virgin Mary. Thus he says, “Our Lady foretold, and warned us about, a way of life that is godless and indeed profanes God in his creatures. Such a life – frequently proposed and imposed – risks leading to hell.”²⁹⁹

The growing influence of Marian apparitions all over the world may not be far from her position as the mother of our saviour Jesus Christ. In fact, the first miracle of Jesus, changing water into wine, was as a result of her intercession. This action and her other roles in the Bible and history of the Church make her vision and devotion prominent. Her prominence has reached an alarming rate that John Paul II called people’s attention to that in his Apostolic Letter, *Tertio Millennio Adveniente*. According to him, “the affirmation of the central place of Christ cannot therefore be separated from the recognition of the

²⁹⁶ Groeschel, *A Still, Small Voice*, 55.

²⁹⁷ McInerney, *Miracles a Catholic View*, 109.

²⁹⁸ Jelly, “Discerning the Miraculous,” 55.

²⁹⁹ Francis, “Holy Mass and Rite of Canonization of Blesseds Francisco Marto and Jacinta Marto,” (May 13, 2017): para. 2, https://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/homilies/2017/documents/papa-francesco_20170513_omelia-pellegrinaggio-fatima.html.

role played by his Most Holy Mother. Veneration of her, when properly understood, can in no way take away from ‘the dignity and efficacy of Christ the one Mediator’. Mary in fact constantly points to her Divine Son and she is proposed to all believers as the model of faith which is put into practice.”³⁰⁰ The main purpose of Marian apparitions and miracles is to direct people to Christ who is Our Lord and Saviour and not otherwise. Many people of this age are more attracted to the Marian apparitions and miracles that they tend to replace the role of Christ in their lives with these private Revelations.

The apparition centres both approved and non-approved keep on attracting many pilgrims from different parts of the world regularly. “Vatican experts estimate that in modern times, the Catholic Church has investigated more than a thousand alleged appearances of Mary, of which only a handful have received official church approval.”³⁰¹ The Church has recognised some apparitions as supernatural events, in other words, they have nothing contrary to the teachings of the Church. Instances of that are Our Lady of Knock in Ireland commemorates every August 21, and the apparition of the Mother of the word, in Kibeho, Rwanda. “During Mass on June 29, 2001, Bishop Augustin Misago presented his declaration on the authenticity of the apparitions. In April 2014, in a further display of approval, Pope Francis urged the Rwandan bishops to be agents of reconciliation, commending them to the Marian apparition at Kibeho.”³⁰² Furthermore, Our Lady of the Rosary (Fatima, Portugal, 1917), Our Lady of Lourdes (Lourdes, France, 1858), the Virgin with the Golden heart (Bearing, Belgium, 1932), and the Virgin of the Poor (Banneux, Belgium, 1932) have received approval.³⁰³ Other apparitions enjoy the approval of their local bishops but are peculiar to their locality. They include Akita, Japan, in 1984; Chontaleu, Nicaragua, in 1987; and Betania, Venezuela.³⁰⁴ Of all these apparitions, Lourdes and Fatima are the most famous and attract millions of pilgrims from different nations every year.

³⁰⁰ John Paul II, “*Tertio Millennio Adveniente*, Apostolic Letter,” (November 10, 1994): no. 43, http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/apost_letters/1994/documents/hf_jp-ii_apl_19941110_tertio-millennio-adveniente.pdf.

³⁰¹ Thavis, *The Vatican Prophecies*, 79.

³⁰² O’Neill, *Exploring the Miraculous*, 126.

³⁰³ O’Neill, 60.

³⁰⁴ International Marian Research Institute, “Apparitions, Approved,” in *International Marian Research Institute All; About Mary*, accessed July 30, 2017, <https://udayton.edu/imri/mary/a/apparitions-approved.php>.

There is no consensus among Marian's experts about the number of apparitions officially recognised by the Church. For René Laurentin,³⁰⁵ a mariologist and an author, they are fifteen of them, and Salvatore Perrella, an expert in Marian apparitions and a professor of theology, they are nine, while information on the website of MiracleHunter.com says they are sixteen in numbers.³⁰⁶ Interestingly, United States of America and Canada have the highest number of alleged apparitions from 1980 till 2015, is as high as 92 apparitions. The rate is alarming and a source of concern to the Church's hierarchy.

One thing about Medjugorje and the like is the spiritual turnaround for the pilgrims. Many people have indeed encountered God here and got reconciled with him in the sacrament of reconciliation there. According to the data, "there are more than thirty confessionals at St. James, arranged by language groups in the open-air atriums on either side of the church."³⁰⁷ This pastoral care of the pilgrims is what the Church offers to people even when the investigation about the authenticity of the apparition is still ongoing. However, some people tend to see this as approval from the Church, which is far from being the truth. In February 2017, Pope Francis mandated the Archbishop of Warsaw-Praga, Poland, Henryk Hoser, to liaise with the bishops of Bosnia and Herzegovina to study on how best to take care of the pastoral needs of the pilgrims. The aim of Pope Francis in sending a bishop to Medjugorje has nothing to do with approval, rather, to study how best to take care of the pastoral needs of the millions of Catholic pilgrims visiting the shrine of the alleged apparition of the Blessed Virgin Mary.³⁰⁸ A lady from America who visited Medjugorje made a serious remark about her experience in the apparition centre. For her and others like her, the most significant benefit of their pilgrimage is catching up with their spiritual lives, return to mass and confession, and the rediscovery of prayers and fasting.³⁰⁹

On a happy note, many people are turning back to God in these apparition sites all over the world. Most of the pilgrims visit these apparition centres seeking solutions to their problems through devotion to Blessed Virgin Mary. In the opinion of Michael O'Neill, "miracles have helped foster an increase in devotions as well as the spread and acceptance of specific Marian dogmas (e.g., the Immaculate Conception in the case of Lourdes).

³⁰⁵ Laurentin, *The Apparitions of the Blessed Virgin Mary Today*, 10.

³⁰⁶ O'Neill, *Exploring the Miraculous*, 62.

³⁰⁷ Thavis, *The Vatican Prophecies*, 62.

³⁰⁸ Associated Press, "Pope Francis sending bishop to Medjugorje," *Catholic Herald*, (February 13, 2017), <http://www.catholicherald.co.uk/news/2017/02/13/pope-francis-sending-bishop-to-medjugorje/>.

³⁰⁹ Thavis, *The Vatican Prophecies*, 63.

Many devotions and devotionals claim supernatural origins by virtue of referencing an originating Marian apparition.”³¹⁰ The impact of the Lourdes’ apparition is still effective in our age especially physical and spiritual healings taking place there.

In this present age, the apparition of Jesus to St. Faustina is recognised by the Church. It is an encounter with the Lord Jesus by a Polish nun Faustina Kowalska which is known as Divine Mercy. She noted her dialogue with Jesus in her diary, published as; *Diary: Divine Mercy in My Soul*. Unlike other apparitions we are conversant with, she claimed to have seen Jesus in her encounter. “The Divine Mercy devotion calls us to ask for and obtain the mercy of God, to trust in Christ’s abundant mercy, and to show mercy to others.”³¹¹ She is known as an apostle of Divine Mercy which the universal Church celebrates every second Sunday in Easter. Faustina was canonized by Pope John Paul II, on April 30, 2000. Equally, other apparitions have led to the establishment of various devotions which are still effective in our time. The observation of first Fridays and Saturdays are attributed to apparitions of our Lady to Margaret Maria Alacoque and Fatima apparitions respectively.

The Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith normally takes over the investigation of apparition once it proves beyond the capacity of the local bishop, whose duty it is to do that. It is clear that an apparition, even when approved by the Church, cannot add anything new to the article of faith of the Church. “For that reason the doctrinal congregation was always scrupulous about monitoring visionaries who claimed to disclose new truths to be held by all Catholics.”³¹² This idea is not to foreclose apparitions as untrue but to approach them with caution. The right frame of mind to approach them should be open mind. Ratzinger in his book-long interview about the condition of Church reiterated the idea of being open-minded about such events. According to him, “we certainly cannot prevent God from speaking to our time through simple persons and also through extraordinary signs that point to the insufficiency of the cultures stamped by rationalism and positivism that dominate.”³¹³ Furthermore, the Church authorities should remember the nature of the people who are not educated but seek God at their levels. Their attitude should be that of patience in line with the position of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith.

³¹⁰ O’Neill, *Exploring the Miraculous*, 27.

³¹¹ O’Neill, 137-8.

³¹² Thavis, *The Vatican Prophecies*, 72.

³¹³ Ratzinger, *The Ratzinger Report*, 111.

How does the Church decide which apparition is extraordinary and which is not? According to Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger what the Church does “is to separate the aspect of the true or presumed ‘supernaturality’ of the apparition from that of its spiritual fruits.”³¹⁴ He used ancient pilgrimage centres which contemporary people would consider incredible to clarify the idea of the two realities. Moreover, he posits that “the pilgrimages of ancient Christianity were often concentrated on places with respect to which our modern critical spirit would be horrified as to the ‘scientific truth’ of the tradition bound up with them. This does not detract from the fact that those pilgrimages were fruitful, beneficial, rich in blessings and important for the life of the Christian people.”³¹⁵ It is when one has separated the two realities that one will be in better position to decide the supernaturality of the claim. The claims cannot contradict the orthodox teaching of the Church, not minding the spiritual fruits to that effect. Meanwhile, the message of Our Lady from all indication comes with some elements of urgency in it. The main dilemma here is how to respond to this urgent message appropriately. Be that as it may, the message may not be as urgent as some people present it. One thing is certain that any genuine message from apparitions will only be reminding us what we know or ought to have known about the message of the Gospel. The dilemma in the opinion of René Laurentin “may well prove to be a false dilemma which cries out for a viable solution: haste and prudence in our urgency. We can pray, fast and be converted speedily according to the messages which echo the gospel, while awaiting the judgement of the Church.”³¹⁶ In fact, it is better to err on the side of caution than on the side of enthusiasm.

According to René Laurentin, “those who seek to prevent this normal exercise of the faith by ordinary people tend, on the other hand, to over-emphasise the judgement of authority as if it were infallible. Thus transfixed by infallibility, the faithful would have to withhold judgement before the decision, and later give consent, in both cases acting blindly.”³¹⁷ Certainly, the position of the commission or the authorities of the Church on apparitions is not infallible. Those who have to discern the reality of the apparitions must bear this in mind always. Nevertheless, there is a need for us to exercise some element of caution and prudence in dealing with the marvellous events. “The magisterium speaks in the name of Christ and with his authority when it proclaims his revelation, the gospel. But when it

³¹⁴ Ratzinger, 112.

³¹⁵ Ratzinger, 112.

³¹⁶ Laurentin, *The Apparitions of the Blessed Virgin Mary Today*, 16.

³¹⁷ Laurentin, 29.

comes to deciding on whether this or that cure is a miracle, the work of God, or whether it was indeed the Virgin who appeared to a visionary, then we are at a different level in the life of the Church.”³¹⁸

Satan has several means of achieving his aims, he can and does appear as the angel of light to deceive people and lead them astray. Apparitions require careful discernment to unravel the truth behind such events. Hence, not all the claims of apparitions are acceptable. This idea is in line with the opinion of John Thavis who says that “distinguishing between a divine apparition and a diabolical trick has always required careful discernment, focusing on the integrity of the seer, the content of messages, and the effect of apparitions on the wider community.”³¹⁹ Furthermore, the discernment of apparitions is not easy, especially in this age, one has to take care of many things in the process of conducting the investigation. The development of the scientific world and rational, critical thinking have broadened our scope of interest. The Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith has underscored the challenges of discernment on their documents. According to the document, “modern mentality and the requirements of critical scientific investigation render it more difficult, if not almost impossible, to achieve with the required speed the judgments that in the past concluded the investigation of such matters (*constat de supernaturalitate, non constat de supernaturalitate*) and that offered to the Ordinaries the possibility of authorizing or prohibiting public cult or other forms of devotion among the faithful.”³²⁰

There are lots of problems emanating from each claim of apparition for the hierarchies of the Church both local and universal. The trend of searching for the new apparition in the contemporary period is highly alarming. Some have made themselves agents with the duty of broadcasting the news of a new apparition immediately, whenever and wherever it happens. Often they are not interested in what the Church is saying or will say about the alleged apparition. These people see anyone who is not reasoning along with them as an unbeliever. They act as if to say that apparition is an article of faith that requires Divine faith. Moreover, the alleged claims of apparitions are sowing a seed of discord and confusion among the people of God. The study document for the Special Assembly for America of the Synod of Bishops, “Encounter with the Living Jesus Christ: Way to

³¹⁸ Laurentin, 29.

³¹⁹ Thavis, *The Vatican Prophecies*, 94.

³²⁰ Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, “Norms Regarding the Manner of Proceeding in the Discernment of Presumed Apparitions or Revelations,” 2.

Conversion, Communion and Solidarity,” underscores some of the problems that apparitions in the contemporary period have caused in some local Churches. There is division among the faithful between those who have accepted an apparition as a supernatural event and those who did not. Hence, the document says that “within the Church community, the multiplication of supposed “apparitions” or “visions” is sowing confusion and reveals a certain lack of a solid basis to the faith and Christian life among Her members. On the other hand, these negative aspects, in their own way, reveal a certain thirst for spiritual things which, if they are properly channeled, can be the point of departure for a conversion to faith in Christ.”³²¹ The situation is embarrassing to all concerned Catholics.

The news about apparitions spread like wildfire especially in this contemporary period of information technology. Bishops are most often unable to control the information about the new apparition. According to John Thavis, “the Vatican was particularly concerned that modern means of global communication were making the church’s cautious, considered approach obsolete. By the time local bishops or the Vatican could even begin to investigate apparitions, they had already become news all over the internet.”³²² It is no longer at ease with the information flying here and there on the web. The local bishop might run into trouble if he tries to adjudicate the authenticity of the apparition as a result of the news already in public domain.

However, in the contemporary period, there is a change in the process of discernment which is not healthy to the issue of apparitions. The spiritual directors have imbibed more knowledge of psychology than the spiritual theology. Therefore, “the prophetic sense and sense of discernment have diminished in the Church. Spiritual directors who should be the leaders in the field have often given way to psychologists and psychoanalysts who are (wrongly) deemed to provide the same service in a more modern package. Their techniques often take no cognisance of the action of God. Spiritual direction and discernment have lost ground in the Church. This is certainly to the detriment of apparitions.”³²³ There is need to listen to people and help them through the process of discernment instead of suppressing their enthusiasm. It is worrisome that the domain of

³²¹ Synod of Bishops Special Assembly for America, “Encounter with the Living Jesus Christ: the Way to Conversion, Communion and Solidarity in America,” (1996): no. 33, http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/synod/documents/rc_synod_doc_01081996_usa-lineam_en.html.

³²² Thavis, *The Vatican Prophecies*, 73.

³²³ Laurentin, *The Apparitions of the Blessed Virgin Mary Today*, 25-26.

spiritual discernment has been taken over by non-spiritual actors like psychologists and psychoanalysts.

Nevertheless, there are many reasons why people support apparitions and healing centres in recent times. One of the reasons is the economic benefits. The people around would like to maximise the opportunity provided by the number of pilgrims to make financial gains. A visit to these centres will certainly shock you on the volume of economic activities going on there. Most often than not, the merchandises belong to the seers, healers or their close associates in recent times. John Thavis while discussing what is going on in Medjugorje with particular reference to seers and their business interest, mentioned Mirjana as one of the seers who have a guesthouse. Moreover, he said, “Mirjana, who is married with two daughters, today runs a pilgrims’ guesthouse near her home that provides much-needed income for her family and gives visitors a chance to speak at length with the visionary.”³²⁴ One of the criteria for the genuine private Revelation is its abhorrence to financial gain. However, in this contemporary period, financial benefits seem to be the major motivating factor for the most healers and visionaries.

2.2.3.1. Types of Apparition

There are three kinds of apparitions or visions as the case may be: corporeal, imaginative, and intellectual. In other words, these are equivalent to what some people call external, internal, and intellectual visions. Corporeal apparitions are visions in which the eyes of the visionary perceive an object normally imperceptible to the sense of sight. This type of an apparition may result from an external reality or a power directly impressing an image on the faculty of sight.³²⁵ This sort of apparition is the most common, and the less comprehensible. Nevertheless, “we assume that the seer sees an objective reality distinct from or alien to the functions of his/her mind. The reality perceived is external to the person, and this happens so spontaneously that the visionary is overwhelmed by the unexpected and inspiring presence of the ‘other,’ the ‘supernatural,’ ‘the apparition.’”³²⁶

Second, internal vision, here “God may and can address Himself directly to the imaginative faculties of our mind. Internal visions are not hallucinations, but God’s

³²⁴ Thavis, *Vatican Prophecies*, 54.

³²⁵ Jelly, “Discerning the Miraculous,” 43.

³²⁶ Johann G. Roten, “Modern Apparitions, New Forms,” in *International Marian Research Institute*, accessed July 30, 2017, <https://udayton.edu/imri/mary/m/modern-apparitions-new-forms.php>.

inspirational power forming representations of His messenger and message at the very core of our cognitive faculties.”³²⁷ Hence, the visionaries could perceive the supernatural beings without knowing the difference between internal and external visions because of God’s grace.

Third, the intellectual visions are devoid of images. The visionary may be aware of a Divine presence with utmost certainty. It could be a conceptual experience of a Divine reality on an in-depth level of spiritual encounter.³²⁸ It is a mystical experience.

Finally, it is assumed that most apparitions are of the internal vision, albeit, not perceived so by the visionaries. Nevertheless, Marian apparitions according to the testimonies of visionaries are perceptible to senses. In the words of Fredrick Jelly, “the accounts of the Marian apparitions, such as those at Lourdes and Fatima, along with many current reports of those not yet approved as worthy of our belief, such as Medjugorje, indicate that the visionaries perceived something corporeal and physical.”³²⁹

2.2.3.2. Characteristics of Apparition

The authentic apparitions have nothing new to add to the deposit of faith, and the visionaries are ready to be directed by the hierarchies of the Church. “One of the marks of the apparitions that have received the personal approval of bishops and popes is that they underline received doctrine and do not claim to add to it. Furthermore, there is an insistence on submission to the Church hierarchy,”³³⁰ Ralph McInerny asserts. The approved apparitions have shown that the humility, innocence, obedience, and other virtuous qualities are the mark of authentic apparitions. They are necessary for the understanding of apparitions. “Genuine visionaries have an instinctive feeling for God’s freedom and human liberty and an acute sense of obedience within which they grow and develop.”³³¹ John Thavis points out the humility of Bernadette about her vision as impressive. Thus he says: “to church officials the humility of Bernadette has always weighed heavily in favor of her credibility. In evaluating apparitions the personal holiness of the seer is crucial. Likewise, innocence, unworldliness, and even inexperience in mystical affairs are seen as positive markers.”³³²

³²⁷ Roten, “Modern Apparitions, New Forms.”

³²⁸ Roten, “Modern Apparitions, New Forms.”

³²⁹ Jelly, “Discerning the Miraculous,” 44.

³³⁰ McInerny, *Miracles a Catholic View*, 91.

³³¹ Laurentin, *The Apparitions of the Blessed Virgin Mary Today*, 30.

³³² Thavis, *The Vatican Prophecies*, 80.

Furthermore, it is clear that Virgin Mary's appearance is not a stereotypical phenomenon. "According to various witnesses she resembles Our Lady of Lourdes with her blue sash, but she also resembles the image on the Miraculous Medal; others describe her as Our Lady of Mount Carmel or Our Lady of Sorrows."³³³ She adapts the culture and language of the people in her communication with them. The gender and age of visionaries vary from male to female, and young to adult. It is not true that all the visionaries are women and children. According to René Laurentin, it is "varying from case to case, the visionaries are children, adolescents and adults, men and women single and married: Bernardo at Cuapa; Renato Baron at Schio; Maria Esperanza Medrano de Bianchini at Finca Betania; Gladys at San Nicolas; Amparo at Escorial; Myrna at Damascus."³³⁴ An apparition is not gender sensitive and any person can have the experience any place.

Also, there is a clear diversity in the apparition claims and their missions. An apparition normally adopts the culture of the visionary thereby differentiating it from other claims. "Another factor that leads to diversity is apparitions' adaptation to each language, culture and country, etc. We have no stereotypical description regarding clothing or age. As in the previous apparitions these differences are a sign of freedom and powers of adaptation of glorified bodies."³³⁵ Still, their mission varies from contemplative, evangelical, and ecumenical from one place to another bearing fruits accordingly. The physical evidence of their missions is the erection of sanctuaries dedicated to apparitions in the different locations which are of national or international status. The apparitions in Fatima, Lourdes, and Guadalupe are obviously of international status with great shrines and basilica in honour of the extraordinary events that took place there. "The biggest sanctuaries in the world (after Rome) are in Guadalupe (Mexico), Lourdes and Fatima."³³⁶

Also, the perception of apparitions tends to be limited to one or two senses, that of sight and hearing. Lisa Schwebel says that "the majority of apparitions (84 percent) are visual, with approximately one-third of them having an auditory component as well. Wholly auditory experiences accounted for 14 percent of cases."³³⁷ In a situation of collective apparitions, there is no guarantee that all the people involved will see and hear the same thing. It varies depending on the individuals.

³³³ Laurentin, *The Apparitions of the Blessed Virgin Mary Today*, 54.

³³⁴ Laurentin, 117.

³³⁵ Laurentin, 117.

³³⁶ Laurentin, 118-9.

³³⁷ Schwebel, *Apparitions, Healings, and Weeping Madonnas*, 43.

Finally, an apparition experience can be associated with beyond death experience in which the person lacks exact words to explain their experience. The visionary is always overwhelmed by the mystery. The visionary is incapable of comprehending and communicating the message correctly because of the nature of the encounter. “Divine manifestations, apparitions and miracles remain mysterious even for the visionary, who is incapable of giving an adequate account of them.”³³⁸ Most often, the stories we hear are the reconciled version of the messages of apparitions.

2.2.4. Miracles of the Saints

It is on record that miracles did not end with the apostles, even though, public Revelation ended with the death of the last apostle. Other people continue to work miracles through the power of Holy Spirit till now. Many holy people have received the gifts to perform prodigious actions. “In the beatifications and canonizations, the Church celebrates verified instances in which the saints bring their miracles to the lives of the faithful. These signs worked after the saints’ deaths are seen as God’s way of giving his blessing to their recognition as holy men or women, and they assure us that these saints are in heaven.”³³⁹

In the contemporary period, we have heard of stories about saintly people performing extraordinary acts. Unlike what we have in the medieval period which came down to us as legends, the contemporary stories are verifiable. In support of this idea, Michael O’Neill says, “documentation is much stronger in the case of the famed modern mystic St. Pio (1887-1968), whose bilocation stories are well known. Despite being a cloistered Capuchin friar, various accounts place him in North and South America and throughout Europe, with some reliable witnesses such as bishops having claimed to have seen him in Rome. Likewise reputable testimony has been given about Padre Pio’s bilocation to the Hungarian dungeon where Jozsef Cardinal Mindszenty was imprisoned in the fifties.”³⁴⁰ People usually appeal to a saint or a would-be saint who has died with the same disease they are suffering. “A similar connection was noted in the first miracle said to have been attributed to the intercession of Pope John Paul II and reported in spring 2007: the cure of Parkinson’s disease in a French nun.”³⁴¹

³³⁸ Laurentin, *The Apparitions of the Blessed Virgin Mary Today*, 49-50.

³³⁹ O’Neill, *Exploring the Miraculous*, 113.

³⁴⁰ O’Neill, 116.

³⁴¹ Duffin, *Medical Miracles*, 40.

The teaching about relics of the saint is something theologians have deduced from the Scripture about materials associated with Jesus and his apostles. The New Testament account of Jesus's healing of a woman who had suffered from haemorrhages for twelve years is an instance, (cf. Matt. 9:20-22). Equally, they explain that the roles of saints are still active even when they have died. They still intercede for the rest of humanity from heaven through their relics. "In a particular way, veneration of the relics of saints recognizes that, first, Christ's role as redeemer involves the assistance of other mediators and, second, that God continues to work through them—even after they have died, through the agency of their bones, garments, and other objects related by touch."³⁴² Relics are things directly related to the saints in question, which include their body parts and materials associated with them. According to Jaclyn Duffin, "the most direct relics were taken from the saint's corpse—hair, bones, finger, heart, or dust from the tomb—in anticipation of future veneration."³⁴³ In the missions of the apostles, materials associated with them served as a means of communication with the sick. These materials became sacramentals and brought healing to many during this period. In the Acts, Paul's face cloths or aprons when applied to the sick received healing, and evil spirit left them.³⁴⁴

Invocation at the tomb of saints and would-be saints for a favour is not new to Catholic Church. It is the tradition of Catholics to visit the tombs of would-be saints and saints asking for help through them. "The most recent in-person (rather than proxy) pilgrimage seems to have been that of Maureen, an American woman with chronic lymphedema of her leg; in 1981 she journeyed to the tomb of Maria Faustina Kowalska in Cracow and was cured."³⁴⁵

The motive behind the use of relics is based on the belief in the resurrection of the dead. In the opinion of Ralph McInerny, "the Christian belief in the resurrection of the dead is one of the bases for the veneration shown the mortal remains of any person, but this is particularly the case with the saints."³⁴⁶ The main reason why people look for relics is for a favour. They want to get connected to God through the intercession of a particular saint or would-be saint. According to Ralph McInerny, "one of the chief reasons for wanting relics and for venerating them was to obtain the intercession of the saint involved. It is

³⁴² Thavis, *The Vatican Prophecies*, 25.

³⁴³ Duffin, *Medical Miracles*, 157.

³⁴⁴ Thavis, *Vatican Prophecies*, 26.

³⁴⁵ Duffin, *Medical Miracles*, 155.

³⁴⁶ McInerny, *Miracles a Catholic View*, 79.

when such favors are received and acknowledged that petition changes to thanksgiving and, again, the thanks are due chiefly to God.”³⁴⁷ People approach them with the belief that they would get favours because of their virtuous lives. Hence, their relics serve as tangible and substantial means of reaching them. In the words of Michael O’Neill, “the physical mementos that holy men and women have left behind allow us to connect with them in a primal way. If the saints were verifiably holy while they were alive, so too must the remains of their bodies have some sort of supernatural power effecting canonization, worthy cures, or other miracles or at the very least be tangible reminders of holiness.”³⁴⁸

On the contrary, one major problem about relics is misconception and misunderstanding of what aim they serve. Most often people do not understand the theology of relics. Hence, their attitudes reflect superstition. That is why some people are not comfortable with the use of relics which appear magical. Furthermore, Catholic Church does not have a method of verifying the authenticity of the most ancient relics trending around. Some unscrupulous elements have taken that opportunity to mess up the good idea behind the use of relics as Michael O’Neill argued: “Certainly relic were sometimes objects of abuse and commerce during the Middle Ages and the Crusades. Catholics, to the outsider’s eye, might be considered to have a strange, superstitious, or even macabre preoccupation with relics, especially if one were to visit the Capuchin church on the Via Veneto in Rome, where the altar and the ceiling are adorned with the remains of monks past.”³⁴⁹

The issue of relics has taken another dimension in this contemporary period. The most worrisome thing is the trafficking of relics online, be it real or fake. “In late 2013, for example, two bone fragments of Saint Martha, a contemporary of Jesus, were being offered on eBay at a ‘buy it now’ price of \$1,090, while a bone chip from the early Christian martyr Saint Theodore was going for \$890. Both came with authentication letters signed by Cardinal Clemente Micara, who was, in fact, vicar-general of Rome in the 1950s and would have been in charge of distributing relics.”³⁵⁰ The aim no doubt is entirely for financial gain which is contrary to the objective. There are many ways of abusing relics and their use other than this one. Some people use them in a way that portrays superstition. Some people trust in the fragments of bones and materials

³⁴⁷ McInerney, 79-80.

³⁴⁸ O’Neill, *Exploring the Miraculous*, 177.

³⁴⁹ O’Neill, 177.

³⁵⁰ Thavis, *The Vatican Prophecies*, 33.

associated with the holy people as the source of blessing in themselves. Such materials are only a channel of God's blessings and nothing more.

Moreover, the news of the incorruptibility of some saints is still making a wave and creating suspicion around the globe in this modern age. Michael O'Neill contends that incorruptibility does not automatically translate to the holiness of life. "Although the Church clearly spares little effort to put these magnificent bodies of specially graced saints on display, it does not consider incorruptibility to be a guarantee of holiness and no longer gives official recognitions of preservations as it once did through the Congregation of Rites."³⁵¹ The Church seems not to be interested in the incorrupt bodies because we have many improved scientific methods of preserving a body presently.

There are many things people consider as supernatural, but they are not all. The devil could simulate most of the things we believe to be miraculous: visions, falsifying ecstasy, curing strange diseases that the devil has himself induced, creating stigmata, simulating levitation and bilocation, producing false locutions, and making bodies incombustible when exposed to flames.³⁵² These prodigious actions do not guarantee that they are signs from God. The devil has the power to produce such signs naturally. Therefore, it is necessary to discern these signs always with every care and prayers. These signs are somehow dividing the faithful into those who accept and those who do not accept such miraculous events. Priests are not spared of aspersion from the people in the contemporary period because of their stand either for or against a particular private Revelation. In fact, it is a source of worry to the hierarchies of Church because of the confusion they have created in the Church. According to John Thavis, "throughout the 1990s Vatican officials were increasingly disturbed at the abundant accounts of visions, apparitions, and divine messages in outlying Catholic communities on every continent."³⁵³

2.2.5. Miraculous Images

"Throughout Christian history in countries all over the world images of Jesus and Virgin Mary have been the source of inspiration and great miracles authenticated by Church authorities, including popes. Miraculous images come in many variations, including bleeding or weeping statues, animated icons, effigies discovered through miraculous

³⁵¹ O'Neill, *Exploring the Miraculous*, 178.

³⁵² Thavis, *The Vatican Prophecies*, 246.

³⁵³ Thavis, 249.

means.”³⁵⁴ Some of the alleged miraculous images have been investigated and approved or rejected by the Church, and sometimes the Church has suspended judgement. Michael O’Neill attested to that in his book, *Exploring the Miraculous*. According to him, “there have been status and icons that have great signs associated with the images themselves. Many instances of a bleeding or weeping statue have been investigated and, in rare cases, approved by the Church.”³⁵⁵ In most cases, they discovered that most of the alleged miraculous images are naturally explainable, while some are beyond what we know about nature and its laws. “In 1995 in Civitavecchia, Italy, a city seventy kilometres north of Rome, a five-year-old girl, Jessica Gregori, noticed that the statue of the Virgin Mary in the family garden was weeping tears of blood.... After a series of scientific tests that showed the blood to be human with male characteristics, a panel of experts declared that the events were not explainable.”³⁵⁶ Another spectacular event that took place in recent past is that of Akita, Japan, with a nun named Sr. Agnes Sasagawa. “She saw her guardian angel, and subsequently an illuminated three-foot-high wooden statue of Our Lady of All Nations bled from its hand... Scientific tests showed that they were human tears and blood. Later, Sr. Agnes’s hearing was restored permanently, as promised by the angel. After several official inquiries, these events of Akita, Japan, were approved as supernatural by the local ordinary, Bishop John Shojiro Ito in 1984.”³⁵⁷ Nevertheless, Akita remains controversial till today because of its messages (the impending natural disasters and the corruption of the Church) which were not approved by the bishop.

2.2.6. Stigmata

Down the memory lane, many saints have borne the wounds of Christ in their bodies as a sign of their intimacy with him. Paul in his Letter to Galatians says, “henceforth let no man trouble me; for I bear on my body the marks of Jesus,” (6:17). This wound is seen as a sign of holiness for some people, but the Church does not consider them during canonization. The authentic wounds are very painful and serve as a reminder to the whole Church about Christ’s sacrifice. In the opinion of Michael O’Neill, the painful aspect of this mark is what makes it what it is. “Authentic wounds are extremely painful and typical are not accompanied by a foul odor. True stigmata, although manifested by an individual, are meant for the Church at large as a reminder of the profound sacrifices of Christ. If it

³⁵⁴ O’Neill, *Exploring the Miraculous*, 149.

³⁵⁵ O’Neill, 151.

³⁵⁶ O’Neill, 151.

³⁵⁷ O’Neill, 152-153.

were not for accompanying suffering, the wounds would be meaningless, merely for show, and be a dangerous temptation to pride.”³⁵⁸ Sometimes the stigmatics do have other spiritual gifts given to them. “St. Padres Pio of Pietrelcina (1887-1978), was surrounded by a panoply of alleged mystical gifts, including visions, bilocation, and the ability to read souls. Servant of God Maria Esperanza de Bianchini (1928-2004) allegedly exhibited all these powers and more, including claiming to receive a vision of Padre Pio himself, who provided her with spiritual direction and his mantle.”³⁵⁹

One of the reasons why some people doubt the authenticity of the stigmata is the variation of the location of the wounds. Some have complete wounds of Christ while others do not. “A key aspect of the stigmata that has been attacked by skeptics is that not all cases are the same, with somewhat varying formations, locations, and depths of the wounds, depending on the recipient.”³⁶⁰ Equally, the duration and time for the wounds differ for each person most often than not. Some people do have the experience at a specific period of the year while some theirs happen throughout the year. Michael O’Neill says “the duration and timing of the wounds can differ among stigmatics as well. Some might exhibit the wounds for a specific time with some meaning—for example, only on Friday at 3 p.m. or during Lent.”³⁶¹ As for the duration of the wounds, it is peculiar to each. For some people, it lasts years, and for others, it is for a short period. For instance, “the stigmata of St. Francis was continuous but only for two years, until his death on October 3, 1226. Those of Therese Neumann lasted forty-eight years and those of St. Pio fifty years.”³⁶² In recent times, people have tried to explain the cause of the wounds psychologically, psychosomatically and autosuggestion, but failed to prove that beyond a reasonable doubt. There is no information about any person who has done that for now. The probability that some people may have inflicted themselves with such wounds cannot be ruled out.

2.2.7. Locution

A locution is another type of Revelation, in which some people do claim to have heard some voice telling them something. Just like vision, locution is of three kinds: Exterior sounds, imaginative words, and intellectual locutions. Our physical ear receives exterior

³⁵⁸ O’Neill, 187.

³⁵⁹ O’Neill, 187-8.

³⁶⁰ O’Neill, 189.

³⁶¹ O’Neill, 192-3.

³⁶² O’Neill, 193.

sounds without any physical origin. On the case of imaginative words, “these are not the products of what is called the imagination, under the direct control of the individual, but rather they occur in the imaging faculty of the individual. They are quite vivid and in the case of supernatural origin they often contradict the expectations of the recipient.”³⁶³ This type of locution is not a hallucination or any pathological disorder. On the other hand, intellectual locutions are simply the communication of concepts and ideas which may be put into words by the person.³⁶⁴ The words can be infused or dictated to the individual, as Benedict Groeschel stated. “In some cases, the words are presented to the recipient as dictation, but for others, such as the great saint and patroness of Europe Birgitta of Sweden, knowledge was infused instantaneously.”³⁶⁵

There is no doubt about God speaking directly to his people, the evidence of such abounds in the Bible. In the life of the Church, many people have had an experience of locution. The most recent one is the experience of Mother Theresa of Calcutta. In her official biography, it was said that she received her second calling to serve the poor through vision and locution. “On 10 September 1946 during the train ride from Calcutta to Darjeeling for her annual retreat, Mother Teresa received her ‘*inspiration*,’ her ‘*call within a call*.’ On that day, in a way she would never explain, Jesus’ thirst for love and for souls took hold of her heart and the desire to satiate His thirst became the driving force of her life. Over the course of the next weeks and months, by means of interior locutions and visions, Jesus revealed to her the desire of His heart for ‘*victims of love*’ who would ‘*radiate His love on souls*.’”³⁶⁶

However, locutions have raised many controversies in the Church in the recent past. The source of the words one hears may not be what one claims it to be. “Saint John of the Cross was aware of the likelihood of error and self-deception, especially in the case of locutions or words heard within the mind but believe to come from God or from some other heavenly being. He believes that often such words are completely the products of the individual’s own unconscious mind. He also recognizes that they may be the product of special grace but even then go through the distortion of the individual’s subjectivity. He also strongly suggests that the locutions may be the work of Satan.”³⁶⁷ An instance of

³⁶³ Groeschel, *A Still, Small Voice*, 154.

³⁶⁴ Groeschel, 155.

³⁶⁵ O’Neill, *Exploring the Miracles*, 139.

³⁶⁶ Congregation for the Causes of Saints, “Mother Teresa of Calcutta, 1910-1997,” (October 19, 2003): para. 4, http://www.vatican.va/news_services/liturgy/saints/ns_lit_doc_20031019_madre-teresa_en.html.

³⁶⁷ Groeschel, *A Still, Small Voice*, 50.

controversial locution is that of Sr. Agnes Sasagawa of Akita- Japan, in 1973. “She reported receiving locution from Virgin Mary through the statue, controversially predicting great troubles in the future of the Church with ‘bishop against bishop, cardinal against cardinal,’ and painting an apocalyptic picture of a great tsunami decimating the earth’s population.”³⁶⁸ The Church has condemned some locutions that are completely contrary to the teachings of Christ and the Church on several occasions. The Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith condemned the writing of an alleged mystic, Vassula Ryden, (*True Life in God*), in 1995,³⁶⁹ putting the faithful on notice, and reiterated such in 2007.³⁷⁰ They did that because her writing contains many doctrinal errors and other things that are not compatible with the faith.

Furthermore, the discernment of locution is very hard considering its nature. There are many things the Church has to consider during the discernment of a locution. Michael O’Neill outlined some of the necessary measures the Church has to consider in her judgement of locution. According to him, “the person hearing the words must ensure that he or she is not responding to an overactive, pious imagination and be able to distinguish between those things contemplated in prayer and a direct communication from God. The Church must decide whether it is dealing with a case of mental illness or fraud, as there is only the testimony and reputation of the locutionist to go on.”³⁷¹

2.3. Summary

In this chapter, the research has presented the meaning of post-biblical miracles otherwise known as private Revelations. Private Revelations are based on the promise Christ made to his followers; they would cure the sick and cast out demons in his name, (cf. Mark 16:18). They are Divine Revelations no doubt but have nothing to add to the already concluded public Revelation. They are an aid to the faith. Hence, all authentic Eucharistic miracles, different claims of apparitions, miracles of the saints, miraculous images, locutions, and stigmata serve as a boost to faith. The content and messages of authentic private Revelations cannot contradict the Scripture and doctrine of the Church. The

³⁶⁸ O’Neill, *Exploring the Miracles*, 144.

³⁶⁹ Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, “Notification,” (October 6, 1995), http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_19951006_ryden_en.html.

³⁷⁰ Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, “Circular Letter to the Presidents of the Episcopal Conferences Regarding the Writings and Activities of Mrs Vassula Rydén,” (January 25, 2007), http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_20070125_vassula-ryden_en.html.

³⁷¹ O’Neill, *Exploring the Miracles*, 139.

subjective nature of private Revelations was manifested vividly from the discussions, not minding the effect of Divine grace on the recipient. The subjective elements in private Revelations introduced some controversial ideas in the content of the message often.

There is no doubt about the reality of supernatural nature of the private Revelations as the research has shown, but there is equally unhealthy stress about that. The implementation of Second Vatican Council's decision on the right of mass media to information made it possible for people to publish news about private Revelations uncensored. On the other hand, the advancement in the modern means of communication and transportations has created much awareness about private Revelations. Consequent upon these facts, post-biblical miracles have somehow divided the faithful along the line of those who believed, and those who do not. It is a serious source of concern to theologians and the Church's hierarchy in this contemporary age. The wrong attitude towards private Revelations has manifested in some superstitious beliefs and practices by the faithful. The Church has written some documents explaining the proper understanding and purpose of post-biblical miracles. Equally, the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith has issued guidelines on how best to conduct prayer of healing within the liturgical celebration and outside it.

Moreover, through proper investigation and discernment of different claims of apparitions, miracles of the saints, miraculous images, locutions, and stigmata one comes to appreciate these realities, which serve as an aid to the faith. For the discernment, some qualities and characteristics are necessary for private Revelations. The virtue of humility is a necessary sign of authenticity on the part of the recipient of the gift. No person can boast about working miracles because it is a gift from God and not our making. Another sign of legitimacy discovered is patience, which in some cases meant endurance of ridicule and insults.

Finally, some people see every reality from the spiritual perspective, while some do so from the material standpoint. Hence, the ongoing debate and struggle are attempts to present the true nature of the world. The world is a composite reality with material and spiritual realities. These extremes are causing many problems in the lives of the people, especially when studying miraculous events. Szolt Aradi described this division when he said, "we live in a world whose citizens have lost all sense of proportion, meaning, purpose. This situation has created, on the one hand, an attitude of extreme credulity amounting almost to superstition, and on the other, a belief in the exclusiveness and totality of matter. One such extreme has led to the nonsense that technology should be

suppressed; the other, to the position that belief in the supernatural should be liquidated once and for all.”³⁷² Nevertheless, this research has tried to situate each side of the reality in its proper position. Hence, in the next chapter, the research is going to focus on the possibility and credibility of miracles in the context of criticisms. Moreover, we have to bear in mind the submission of Mark Corner who says “agreeing to the proposition that not all reports of miracles are true does not require one to agree that they are all false. Some may be true and others false.”³⁷³

³⁷² Aradi, *Understanding Miracles*, 12.

³⁷³ Mark Corner, *Signs of God: Miracles and their Interpretation* (Hampshire: Ashgate, 2005), 22.

CHAPTER THREE

POSSIBILITY AND CREDIBILITY OF MIRACLES IN THE CONTEXT OF CRITICISMS

Walter Kasper has described the contemporary minds' stance on miracles presently and lays bare their mindset. As contemporary people battle with the shift in the understanding of reality, they tend to reject things like miraculous events. They do so because they could not fit into their thought system. "The growth of critical thought and its interest in proven, applicable knowledge brought about a concentration on general and uniform aspects of reality. However, when particulars receive their definition primarily from analogy and correlation with everything else, the sense of the incalculable, the unique, the once-for-all, disappears. Extraordinary events are no longer regarded with astonishment. They are reduced to the general level of what can in theory be explained."³⁷⁴

The debate about the possibility and credibility of miracles reached its climax during the enlightenment era. The debate is still ongoing because of the failure of science to fulfil their claims. They claimed to have discovered explanations for the physical actions in the world. Whenever one hears people asking, 'are miracles possible'? They are asking if it is conceivable, coherent, or logically possible, that such special Divine actions are in accord with the natural order of things.³⁷⁵ Whenever one decides to discuss the issue of the possibility and credibility of miracles, some challenges crop up. According to Mark Corner, these challenges are more of scientific and philosophical objections. Once the concerns about the possibility of miraculous arise, the image of 'the modern world' which is determined comes up. The success of science in predicting the regularity of events in nature makes it increasingly difficult, even to conceive an event occurring somehow independently outside this determined world.³⁷⁶ This scientific understanding reached its climax in the 19th century. During the period in question, the possibility of miracles was greatly hampered, but that did not foreclose the possibility of miraculous events. "Although it has been undermined by a more modern indeterministic view of nature, even a deterministic theory of science does not exclude the possibility of miracles, provided the determinism is properly qualified by the awareness that the necessity of physical law is precisely a physical or "natural" necessity, one that allows for intervention of the

³⁷⁴ Kasper, *Jesus the Christ*, 77.

³⁷⁵ McInerney, *Miracles a Catholic View*, 138.

³⁷⁶ Corner, *Signs of God: Miracles and their Interpretation*, 34-5.

supernatural, not a metaphysical necessity.”³⁷⁷ On the philosophical level, the objections to miracles come from atheists and deists who contend non-existence of God and immutability of God’s creations respectively. “The error in this view consists in the failure to see that miracles, like other forms of supernatural intervention, do not change or destroy nature or correct some essential defect in it, but build on nature and provide it with a complementary and higher perfection.”³⁷⁸

Furthermore, there is another perspective to what miracles stand for in the contemporary period. According to Craig Keener, “since the argument of David Hume, however, much of modern academia has a priori ruled out claims of direct supernatural activity in the natural world. Because many of the foundations of Hume’s argument no longer fit our contemporary philosophic and scientific context, many scholars have begun to question the Humean paradigm.”³⁷⁹ The consideration of miracles falls within the domain of religion and theology; those who believe in the existence of God that has the power to do what he wants. It is neither under the purview of science nor that of philosophy. “In this view the main emphasis with regard to the recognition of miracles is to be placed on the religious context. Not any religious context whatsoever is sufficient. The context must be such that one can reasonably conclude that God in His providence would not cause or allow the extraordinary event in question unless He did intend it to be taken as a sign from Him.”³⁸⁰ Hence, science and philosophy cannot form a solid ground on which to judge the reality and the possibility of miracles because it is not within their jurisdiction to do so.

Under the historical recognition of miracles, there are historically attested miraculous events, occurring in the presence of numerous reliable witnesses, and even in the very before of the unbelievers.³⁸¹ Interestingly, on the application of the historical methodology on the data from marvellous works one authenticates their historical credibility. That is to say; one can prove that most miracles are not legends.

Also, there is a need to differentiate between Divine providence and special Divine actions (miracles). It is necessary to understand, on the one hand, Divine providence,

³⁷⁷ T.G Pater, ed., “Miracles,” in *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, 2nd ed., ed. Berard L. Marthaler (Detroit: Gale, 2003), 9:667.

³⁷⁸ Pater, 667.

³⁷⁹ Keener, *Miracles*, loc. 3284 of 51259.

³⁸⁰ Pater, “Miracles,” 667-8.

³⁸¹ Pater, 667.

which is God's action in creating and sustaining the world each minute of the day. On the other hand, special Divine action refers to God's action that has to do with one particular event. One instance of a special Divine action is the resurrection of Jesus Christ.³⁸²

"Furthermore, there are credulous believers who do not care what science says; and on the other side there are equally credulous agnostics who dismiss the possibility of miracles and believe only in science."³⁸³ It is a wrong assumption for any side to deny the existence of the other a priori. They can help each other to clarify their positions about the existence of Divine and physical realities. "For those who believe in the omnipotence of God and have no doubt that He can suspend the laws of nature, the possibility of the miracle seems easy and obvious. But it is reasonable that not only the skeptic, but also the believer should resort to the aid of science to test the authenticity of any extraordinary occurrence. In addition, there is something genuinely beautiful in the endless endeavour of men to carry on scientific research. To this we owe all our material discoveries, and our entire technological progress."³⁸⁴ It is pertinent to consider other difficulties militating against miraculous claims, as to understand the challenges against the possibility of miracles very well.

3.1. Difficulties Against Miraculous Claims

In the words of Craig Keener, people's attitude to the idea of miracles varies: "One worldview expects miracles, whereas another doubts them, and each interprets experiences and phenomena accordingly. Both worldviews, however, are equally presuppositions. Indeed, a stance critically open to the possibility of miracles allows for the most open-minded stance."³⁸⁵ The development in science has done much in clarifying the authenticity of miracles than otherwise. Nevertheless, it is not their duty to discern miraculous events rather it is in the domain of religion and theology. "While formally scientific knowledge is not necessary for the discernment of miracles, it can be of assistance, both negatively and positively. It is often erroneously asserted that the progress of science has weakened the case for miracles. Science has indeed furnished a natural explanation of certain phenomena that may have once been looked upon as

³⁸² Corner, *Signs of God*, 35.

³⁸³ Aradi, *Understanding Miracles*, 261.

³⁸⁴ Aradi, 262.

³⁸⁵ Keener, *Miracles*, loc. 3643 of 51259.

supernatural in some sense, especially by primitive man.”³⁸⁶ Be that as it may, science has developed instruments to help humanity to achieve great things, but there is a difference in the mode of achieving their results and that of miracle. T.G. Pater argues that “science has not enabled man to reproduce any of the prodigies related of Christ, especially in the way in which He did them, i.e., without scientific instruments. And even if science were to bring this about, it would still have been miraculous for Christ to do such things at a time when the necessary scientific knowledge was, humanly speaking, unavailable.”³⁸⁷ In fact, scientific endeavours have helped tremendously in the understanding of the physical nature and its limit.

Jesus’ miracles have two major challenges, historical and scientific. Walter Kasper, the great theologian of Catholic Church, outlined these problems thus, “as regards the miracles of Jesus, this transformation of our experience of the world and history since the Enlightenment has created two sorts of problems, historical problems and scientific ones. Historical scepticism with regard to the miracle reports requires us to examine them with great care, and the scientific approach calls for a fundamental reconsideration of the whole concept of miracle.”³⁸⁸ In the critical historical study of the miracle tradition, Kasper has these to say: 1. “Literary criticism reveals a tendency to intensify, magnify and multiply the miracles. According to Mk 1. 34, Jesus healed many sick; in the parallel Mt 8.16 he heals them all.”³⁸⁹ The consequence of such attitude as to develop, magnify, and intensify miracles’ story in the Bible would weaken the credibility of the miracles.³⁹⁰ 2. Furthermore, the noticeable similarities between miracles in the Gospels’ tradition and rabbinic and hellenistic traditions serve as a negative approval. “The New Testament accounts of miracles are analogous to, or use, themes familiar to us from other ancient sources. There are for example, rabbinic and hellenistic miracle stories of cures, expulsions of demons, raisings from the dead, quellings of storms, and so on. Numerous parallels exist in the case of Jesus’ contemporary, Apollonius of Tyana, and many healings are reported in particular from the sanctuary of Asclepius at Epidaurus.”³⁹¹ It would look as if the New Testament accounts copied from the ancient traditions of the people to present Jesus Christ as a powerful man through his miraculous works. It is a

³⁸⁶ Pater, “Miracles,” 669.

³⁸⁷ Pater, 669.

³⁸⁸ Kasper, *Jesus the Christ*, 77.

³⁸⁹ Kasper, 77.

³⁹⁰ Kasper, 77.

³⁹¹ Kasper, 78.

serious challenge in presenting the miraculous stories in the contemporary period with these facts available in the historical records.

More still, the discovery by scholars using a form criticism as their tool that some miracle stories are of post-Easter rendition makes the miraculous stories to look like fabrications. In the words of Walter Kasper, some “miracle stories turn out in the light of form criticism to be projections of the experiences of Easter back into the earthly life of Jesus, or anticipatory representations of the exalted Christ. Among these epiphany stories we should probably include the stilling of the storm, the transfiguration, Jesus’ walking on the lake, the feeding of the four (or five) thousand and the miraculous draught of fishes. The clear purpose of the stories of the raising from the dead of Jairus’s daughter, the widow’s son at Naim and Lazarus is to present Jesus as Lord over life and death.”³⁹² The purpose of all these is to present miracle stories in the Gospels as unhistorical reports. Even though there may be some miracle stories which are statements of faith and theologically valuable, however, there are still many historically authenticated miracle stories in the Gospels about Jesus. Walter Kasper insists that “it would nevertheless be wrong to conclude from this view that there are no historically authenticated miracles of Jesus. The opposite is the case. There can scarcely be a single serious exegete who does not believe in a basic stock of historically certain miracles of Jesus.”³⁹³ Richard Purtill argues that the likes of Hume in their attempts to deny the occurrence of miracles beg the question. Their assumption is faulty from the outset. “To assume at the outset of framing a definition that the sort of event being defined has ‘never been observed in any age or country’ assumes as a premise what is supposed to be proved as the conclusion and is therefore guilty of begging the question.”³⁹⁴

The controversy about the meaning of Jesus’ miraculous events is not new. It started during his lifetime here on earth. People then gave them different interpretations as the contemporary people are doing today. Walter Kasper in his submission says “it is generally accepted that facts themselves are ambiguous, and only acquire a meaning from the context in which they are put by the language of interpretations. This applies with particular force to Jesus’ miracles. Even during his lifetime there are signs of a dispute about the meaning of his mighty deeds. Some saw them as signs of God’s action, while

³⁹² Kasper, 78.

³⁹³ Kasper, 78.

³⁹⁴ Richard L. Purtill, “Defining Miracles,” in *In Defense of Miracles*, eds. R. Douglas Geivett and Gary R. Habermas (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1997), 65.

Jesus' opponents called them demonic illusions, deceit and chicanery (cf. Mk 3. 22–30). In our times attempts are made to 'explain' cures of fever, lameness and leprosy (a term used for various skin diseases) as 'psychological'.³⁹⁵ In the same vein, some people consider Jesus' miracles as a 'suggestion therapy', and so, interpret them theologically and not as God's action. "This raises the question of the mode of reality to which we are to allocate the events the miracle accounts relate. That question takes us from the historical problems to the much more fundamental set of problems: the scientific problems raised by miracles."³⁹⁶

There are some schools of thought that have a repressive attitude towards miraculous occurrence. For instances, "rationalism did not allow for any contact between heaven and earth. God could not miraculously intervene in a given place. Scientism declared the miracle to be impossible and, as a consequence, apparitions to be mere hallucinations."³⁹⁷ Moreover, in a heightened manner, "the philosophy of idealism, which has dominated our era since Kant and Hegel, reduced to subjectivity, not only apparitions and other communications with the transcendent, but also all miracles and the resurrection of Christ himself. This philosophical system, according to which all that is known is knowledge, eliminated the dynamic tension between knowledge and reality and thereby allowed full sway to subjectivity in all things, but particularly apparitions."³⁹⁸

The duty of coming to terms with the contemporary understanding of the reality from the scientific point of view is a challenge. Their influence is enormous in the thoughts and understanding of the people of this age at least theoretically. According to science, the natural reality is bound by laws that determined their working and nature. "The premise of the scientific approach is a wholly law-bound determination of all events. The unique, the particular and the extraordinary are also covered by this postulate, even if in practice they cannot (yet) be completely explained. In scientific theory there is no room for a miracle in the sense of an event with no physical cause and therefore no definable origin."³⁹⁹

The advancement of scientific knowledge and the credibility of theology are hindered when one decides to locate miracles in the practical impossibility of tracing the causes of

³⁹⁵ Kasper, *Jesus the Christ*, 79.

³⁹⁶ Kasper, 79.

³⁹⁷ Laurentin, *The Apparitions of the Blessed Virgin Mary Today*, 23.

³⁹⁸ Laurentin, 23.

³⁹⁹ Kasper, *Jesus the Christ*, 81.

certain events. In recent times, it seems science has accepted that it could not even in principle apprehend all the determining factors. In other words, the human mind cannot understand the reality as a whole. “In other words, every event is completely contingent and also completely determined. And because that tension between the contingent nature of the particular and the general nature of its determination is fundamental, it is not possible to find a place for miracles in the over-determination of the particular as opposed to the general.”⁴⁰⁰

It seems impossible to accept miracles as a reality without denying the nature of God, who wills the existence of the order in the world. Overtly, miracles apparently contradict the nature of God from a deterministic view. This idea is from the deists, who believe God has finished his creative activities once and for all. However, that is not the correct understanding of the nature of God, who is the cause of everything that is. Ralph McInerny argues that “given that idea, if the order of things is considered as depending on the first cause, then God can do nothing against the order of things, since then he would obviously be working at cross-purposes, against himself. But if the order of things is considered insofar as it depends on a secondary cause, then God can do something outside the order of things. God is not subject to the order established by secondary causes; rather, that order is subject to him; the natural order does not proceed from God by a necessity of his nature, but voluntarily; consequently, he could bring about another order of things than that which de facto exists.”⁴⁰¹

God’s creative activities in the world have not ended and any deist who rejects the occurrence of miracles must first prove that God’s creative actions have ended. In the sense that the world is immutable, and nothing again can happen outside the known regularity of it. Therefore, “in order to establish the theoretical impossibility of miracles, one would have to show that God, in creating the world, wills that he will never intervene in the natural world in order to produce variations from what would normally be produced by created causes. If that were the assumption of creation, then miracles would tell against God’s immutability, and thus would be impossible in principle. But there seems little reason to accept this as a condition of creation.”⁴⁰² In other words, if the events of the

⁴⁰⁰ Kasper, 81.

⁴⁰¹ McInerny, *Miracles a Catholic View*, 135.

⁴⁰² McInerny, 135.

world were determined, then there is no room for miracles. However, this idea is not the true representation of the world in relation to God.

Furthermore, science has added randomness as a characteristic of physical reality because it was recently discovered that some physical particles are undetermined. This discovery lends credence to the possibility of miracles in the world. They occur at random without any pre-determined pattern. The view that some events are undetermined gives room for the possibility of miracles. In the words of Ralph McInerny, “the notion of a created world which naturally includes necessary and regular and random occurrences seems conceptually more hospitable to the possibility of miracles than does a deterministic view of the natural world.”⁴⁰³ It is wrong to use a human template to measure the Supernatural capacities and abilities. As a human being, one has a limit to what one can do and cannot do in this world. Hence, “we must be very careful not to think of miracles as impossible events which nonetheless God brings about. Of course the events may be impossible from one point of view and not from another.”⁴⁰⁴ The nature of things will undoubtedly say much about the circumstance of what happens to a particular event.

3.1.1. Miracles and Laws of Nature

The correct expression for the relationship between miracles and laws of nature is problematic. The expression that God does suspend the natural laws at a particular point is confusing. According to Karl Rahner, the notion that miracle is the interruption of the laws of nature is the most acceptable idea. “Insofar as God is different from the finite world and has omnipotent freedom over the world, the notion of miracle as an interruption of the laws of nature can be valid. If with the formula that in miracles God suspends the laws of nature in a particular instance one intends to state nothing else but the fact, which certainly belongs to the Christian concept of God, that God exists in sovereign freedom, omnipotence, and domination vis-à-vis this world and in *this* sense is not bound by the laws of nature, then it can indeed be said: miracles are something like an interruption of the laws of nature.”⁴⁰⁵

In our bid to clarify the correct idea of miracles in relation to laws of nature, there are things one needs to put into consideration so as not to lose the meaning of miracles and their sign functions. “First of all, for our modern experience and interpretation of the

⁴⁰³ McInerny, 136.

⁴⁰⁴ McInerny, 136-7.

⁴⁰⁵ Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith*, 258-9.

world, every stratum, every dimension, of reality is constructed from the lower to the higher, that is, from the more empty and indetermined to the more complex and full, and it is open for the higher dimension. The higher dimension implies in its own reality the lower dimension as an element of itself, and subsumes it into itself in the Hegelian sense, both preserving it and surpassing it.”⁴⁰⁶ Hence, it does not suspend or violate the laws of the lower dimension of the reality. At the same time, this does not mean that lower dimension has its complex existence in the higher. Avery Dulles commenting on the position of Karl Rahner on miracles and laws of nature says miracles need not involve a suspension of the laws of nature. Rather, nature fundamentally depends on the transcendent order of causality. In the same way, the laws of inorganic matter do not need to be suspended to make room for biological processes, so God does not need to manifest himself through violation of nature.⁴⁰⁷

Pope John Paul II supports the notion that miracles do not oppose the forces and laws of nature. For him, “they merely imply a certain empirical suspension of their ordinary function and not their annulment. Indeed, the miracles described in the Gospel indicate the existence of a Power superior to the forces and laws of nature, but which at the same time operates according to the demands of nature itself, even though surpassing its actual normal capacity.”⁴⁰⁸ This spiritual power enhances and elevates the forces in nature to act beyond their normal capacity. For instance, the rate at which healing normally takes place is quite different from what one sees in the miraculous healing. Furthermore, miracles are not against the laws of nature since they are an exception to these laws. Physical laws are not prescriptive rather they are descriptive. Therefore, they cannot claim to account for the whole reality. In the opinion of T. G. Pater, “physical laws are conditional, not absolute. They state what happens under natural conditions but do not exclude the possibility of supernatural exceptions. The physical certitude, accordingly, is in favor of the general law, not against the exception, and is therefore in no way opposed to the moral certitude which is precisely in favor of the exception.”⁴⁰⁹ Natural laws act on the condition of *ceteris paribus*—all things being equal. That is to say that the laws of nature presume

⁴⁰⁶ Rahner, 259.

⁴⁰⁷ Avery Dulles, *Models of Revelation* (New York: Doubleday, 1983), 147.

⁴⁰⁸ John Paul II, “Miracles Manifest the Supernatural Order, General Audience,” para. 3.

⁴⁰⁹ Pater, “Miracles,” 667.

that no other factor is interfering with the activity it describes be it natural or supernatural.⁴¹⁰

When one considers miracles as God's special acts, it does not mean he will do something new in his creative purpose. Rather, he empowers his creatures, though finite, to act in line with his creative purpose. "According to the classical doctrine, God is omnipresent and is, indeed, at work in every action. To exert his causality, he does not need to come into the world from outside, as an interloper. As transcendent ground, he empowers created agents to move themselves. For him to be specially at work, he does not need to be more active than at other times, but only to see to it that the effects correspond to his creative and redemptive purposes. When, through his omnipresent and encompassing causality, God brings finite reality into special affinity with himself, the effect is, in a special sense, his deed."⁴¹¹

Avery Dulles used the characteristics of the cause and effect to throw more light on the relationship existing between nature and Divine reality. According to him, "to hold that the characteristics of an effect can be determined by God as first cause without violation of the processes of secondary causality presumes that secondary causality is open to being directed in this way. From all that we know about the structure of reality, this does not seem unlikely. When I design a machine, I do not violate any laws of physics and chemistry, but I harness the forces already there to bring about an effect of a higher order, namely a device which by the joint activity of its parts can serve a specific human purpose."⁴¹² If that is the true understanding of the reality, then one assumes that God, as the first cause, can bring things in line with his purpose without destroying the secondary cause.

3.1.2. God's Relation to the World

"God is not only someone who creates a world different from himself with its structures and laws and its own dynamism, and establishes it permanently outside of himself, its creative ground; in his free and supernatural self-communication God has also made himself the ultimate and highest dynamism of this world and its history."⁴¹³ Transcendent is not the only attribute of God; he is equally immanent in his creatures. Through God's

⁴¹⁰ Lee Strobel, *The Case for Faith* (Grand Rapids: Zonderan, 2000), 85.

⁴¹¹ Dulles, *Models of Revelation*, 146.

⁴¹² Dulles, *Models of Revelation*, 147.

⁴¹³ Rahner, *Foundation of Christian faith*, 260-261.

creative activities he communicates himself to his creatures. “Consequently, the creation of the other has to be understood to begin with as a moment within this divine self-communication to the other, a moment which God’s self-communication presupposes as the condition of its own possibility insofar as it constitutes in this world created *ex nihilo sui et subjecti*; the addressee of this self-communication of God.”⁴¹⁴ In the opinion of Karl Rahner, the relationship between God and the laws of nature presents the structure for the possibility of his self-communication. Thus he says, “the laws of nature as well as the general structures of the historical must be understood to begin with as the structures of this precondition which the free and personal self-communication of God creates as the condition of its own possibility.”⁴¹⁵ Theologically, it is not possible to suspend the structures God has created for his self-manifestation. “The law of nature and also of history must be regarded from this vantage point as an element within grace, that is, within God’s self-communication, and hence also as an element within the history of revelation and salvation. From this perspective and hence precisely from a theological vantage point, and not merely because of a modern, rational skepticism, there is no reason why this presupposition would then have to be abolished and suspended if God’s self-communication is to come to appearance in its own presupposition, the very presupposition which this very self-communication creates for itself.”⁴¹⁶ Miracles take place in the theological sense, and not precisely in the sense of a preternatural marvel. They are marvels with the intention of communicating God’s purpose and not to trill people.

There is need to verify, to what extent natural laws represent the reality, to understand their roles in our daily activities. In other words, to what extent do well-confirmed scientific theories, and the laws of nature they embodied, describe what occurs in reality? All the scientific theories that are considered successful and have the status of laws are based on the detailed observed pattern in the physical and chemical world. They have come to be through continuous experiments and modifications. Besides, they are not products of a first instance. These laws and theories depend heavily on the observations of the reality with its limited capacity of revealing the whole reality under study. Science

⁴¹⁴ Rahner, 261.

⁴¹⁵ Rahner, 261.

⁴¹⁶ Rahner, 261.

focuses on stable and characteristic features that are accessible to generalise their findings.⁴¹⁷

A scientist has a defined confine under which he or she works and ignores anything that does not fall within this precinct as unnecessary. The scientist does this elimination through an ‘a priori’ methodology without any empirical verification most often. Accordingly, Karl Rahner says such a person cannot be an ordinary scientist, “for in the actualization of his existence he has already gone beyond this a priori methodological limitation, and as a moral agent he can never make decisions *only* according to the laws of the exact sciences by themselves.”⁴¹⁸

Science has not proved that it is capable of clarifying the issue of miracle because of its subject matter. René Latourelle submits that “the title of “miracle” are unexplainable by science past or present and that, given the nature of the facts, science has no well founded hope of giving a satisfactory explanation in the future. On the other hand, the religious context guides the mind to the only hypothesis that makes the observed facts completely intelligible.”⁴¹⁹ Nevertheless, there are other possible explanations some people have advocated as possible causes of such wondrous actions. Subsequently, the research will focus on such explanations proposed as explications for marvellous works.

Natural order does not encompass all reality but an aspect of it. It would be mistaken to think that reality is represented in the natural laws. On the relationship existing between God and the natural order, Pope John Paul II has this to say, “these miracles demonstrate the existence of the supernatural order, which is the object of faith. Those who observed them and particularly those who experienced them were made aware as if by the touch of a hand that the natural order does not exhaust the whole of reality. The universe in which we live is not limited merely to the range of things accessible to the senses and even to the intellect itself conditioned by sense knowledge. The miracle is a sign that this order is surpassed by the ‘power from on high,’ and is therefore also subject to it.”⁴²⁰

At this point, it is germane to elucidate the nature of laws of nature. From all indications, the laws of nature are descriptive and not prescriptive. People describe what they have observed from the regularity of nature for some time under certain conditions as laws of

⁴¹⁷ Edwards, *How God Acts*, 84.

⁴¹⁸ Rahner, *Foundation of Christian Faith*, 263.

⁴¹⁹ Latourelle, *The Miracles of Jesus and the Theology of Miracles*, 318.

⁴²⁰ John Paul II, “Miracles Manifest the Supernatural Order, General Audience,” para. 2, 4.

nature. Certainly, they do describe the behaviour of the natural world in certain circumstances and attribute this behaviour to a particular cause and influences. The laws of nature are human descriptions of observed regularities. There is no proof to show that natural laws are responsible for the regularity in nature. Rather it is the description of the observed regularity in nature of things.⁴²¹ There seems to be a pattern in the observed reality which by no means is not from the laws and theories formulated to explain the events; rather, it is from the events themselves. Denis Edwards explains the difference between the reality itself and the natural laws that describe it. Thus he says that “the models give the appearance of imparting necessity, but this apparent necessity does not come from the models; rather, it is hidden in the observed entities and their regularities. The ultimate source of the regularity we observe is not the model we articulate. The model itself does not tell us why this model holds and not some other. While the theories and laws of nature can describe reality well and point to intermediate causal connections between different levels of reality, they do not prescribe reality. They do not cause it to be the way it is.”⁴²²

The laws of nature are our conscious and sustained outcome of our observations of events in the world. They have two meanings; what we know or observed about them and what they are in themselves. “The laws of nature as we know them are provisional, imperfect and limited, and not well equipped to deal with important areas of life, including not only the metaphysical, but also the mental, the ethical, the interpersonal, the aesthetic, and the religious. The existence of parts of reality that defy scientific analysis, such as personal relationships or deeply held values, is an indication not that these phenomena are illusory but that the laws of nature, meaning the natural sciences as we know them, do not model or describe central aspects of reality.”⁴²³ As it turns out to be, natural laws as we understand them, have limited capacity in dealing with a particular aspect of our lives. It is an indication that laws of nature are limited in their application to the reality. The religious aspect of our lives which is under consideration here is not directly under the control of laws of nature or subject to them as indicated.

Hence, miraculous events may manifest reality beyond what is seen or thought to be but yet within the capacity of reality. That is within the realm of God’s intention. In the words

⁴²¹ Edwards, *How God Acts*, 85.

⁴²² Edwards, 86.

⁴²³ Edwards, 86-87.

of Denis Edward, “this clarification has important consequences for a theology of miracles. It suggests that a marvelous manifestation of the Spirit, such as an act of healing, may take us beyond the laws of nature understood in the first sense—as our limited models of reality. But it may not be beyond the laws of nature understood in the second sense—as the relationships and processes that function in reality, which are more than we have fully understood or adequately modeled. And, of course, all of these patterns of relationship and causality that escape our present models are, theologically, secondary causes.”⁴²⁴ The means of God’s self-communication to his people is not in line with what science and philosophy think and say. On the contrary, it is as God wants it. Besides, there are more hypotheses to explain what may have been responsible for what people call “miracles”, like unknown forces and statistical laws.

3.1.3. Unknown Forces and Statistical Laws

Some people are of the view that an explanation for what is called miraculous today may be found in the future. In other words, some people hope that the laws responsible for the so-called miraculous events will come to light in the near future. Hence, they posit that the unknown forces belonged to a group of undiscovered laws of nature. René Latourelle argues, “that the instantaneousness which is characteristic of miraculous cures of organic illnesses contrasts sharply with what we see endlessly and daily repeated in the restoration of organic tissues, namely, that the normal healing of such tissues is subject to the law of time and stages.”⁴²⁵ On the other hand, there is a difference in mode of operation between the laws of nature and miraculous events. The consideration of an event is never done outside the context in which it takes place. Then the question is, how is it possible that the unknown forces of nature that some people claim to account for miracles do not work outside a religious context of holiness, prayer, and Divine mission? Here one is not considering one or two miraculous events but series of miracles. Therefore, there is never a way one can reject the religious explanation of extraordinary events and accept unknown forces of nature as the best explanation of such events under no context.⁴²⁶ In fact, there is a problem of how to justify the claim of unknown forces of nature as the cause of such magnitude of events.

⁴²⁴ Edwards, 87.

⁴²⁵ Latourelle, *The Miracles of Jesus and the Theology of Miracles*, 318-9.

⁴²⁶ Latourelle, 319.

It is more reasonable to accept that miracle has happened than to dismiss it with all these arguments that will eventually lead one back to believe indirectly. Mark Corner argues thus, “but these ‘scientific leaps forward’ do not quite represent the same thing as ‘transgressions’ of the laws of nature. In the case of ‘marvels’ it is true that one law is broken, but only because another has been found. The law of gravitation gives way to the law of relativity. In the case of miracles, all laws have to give way. Even in the case of quantum theory, where some have argued that all laws give way, they give way to a theory of random behaviour which is itself a kind of law. But where a miracle is concerned we are asked to believe not that we need a better law but that we will never find one.”⁴²⁷ That is the correct attitude towards this spiritual reality called miracle.

The two schools of thought with regard to the understanding of the reality, determinism and indeterminism have given rise to rigid determinism. These groups are making every effort to explain away the whole issue of miraculous events. “These two conceptions of nature have this in common—that they both refuse miracles any place. Determinism excludes them because they fall outside the laws of nature. Indeterminism excludes them because they are never sure signs of a divine intervention; the reason is the impossibility of excluding the hypothesis of fluctuations so that miracles would in fact fit into the framework of natural causality.”⁴²⁸ All these are attempts to account naturally for the miraculous events in the world.

Furthermore, there is a new development in the procedure of science about the statistical laws which account for the miraculous events in the world. In the words of René Latourelle, “the statistical laws that are at work in many natural phenomena are invoked for the position that a miracle may simply be one of those fluctuations which are indeed highly improbable but are nonetheless allowed for by statistical laws. This being so, there is no need to postulate an intervention of God; the event would fall within statistical law.”⁴²⁹ One is sure that this argument is dead on arrival, on the condition of its unlikelihood to take place. The reality of such an event equates to chance, but there are many extraordinary events to nullify the rare occurrence of such. Miraculous events are the response of God to people’s petitions and prayers and not a matter of chance.

⁴²⁷ Corner, *Signs of God*, 25.

⁴²⁸ Latourelle, *The Miracles of Jesus and the Theology of Miracles*, 319.

⁴²⁹ Latourelle, 319.

The statistical laws are laws expressing the ‘constancy’ of natural phenomena.⁴³⁰ They are categorised as classical when they obey the laws of Newtonian mechanics, or quantum type when they obey the laws of quantum mechanics. “When phenomena are expressed in terms of statistical law, the law assigns a specific numerical probability to each of the various possible results of a series of observations. Among these possible results, there is usually one that enjoys a relatively high probability, and the result is called *normal*, in the sense that it is the one most frequently observed. The other, less probable results are described as *fluctuations* in relation to the habitually observed “normal” result; each of these fluctuations can be observed with a frequency proportionate to the degree of probability assigned to it.”⁴³¹ What is the relationship between statistical laws and miracles? The probability of fluctuation is considered to be high when its occurrence is very rare in relation to the normally observed phenomena. “This is what gives physical phenomena the appearance of following rigid laws. The probability of fluctuations great enough to be directly observed is usually improbably small. Thus the probability that as a result of a statistical fluctuation there will be a difference of 1% in the pressure in two different cubic centimetres of air is of the order of 1/1 followed by six million zeros. Yet this is a relatively insignificant fluctuation and not one that would be a major wonder.”⁴³² Therefore, miracles because of their rare occurrence are considered major fluctuations and should be considered insignificant and unobserved. Hence, no scientist would allow such inconsiderable phenomena to reflect in their research. On the contrary, René Latourelle argues that “it is quite improbable that one can dismiss the phenomena we call miracles by classifying them as “major fluctuations.”⁴³³

Is it possible to recognise miracles in the world controlled by statistical laws? Yes, it is possible because the statistical laws are not the totality of everything in the world. René Latourelle marshalled out some points against the statistical laws. “First point to be made is that there are wonders which no theory can reduce to statistical fluctuations: for example, the raising of someone from the dead, or any wonder that is equivalent to an act of creation.”⁴³⁴ Second, science does not consider all the laws of nature as statistical laws.⁴³⁵ Third, “the improbability of any explanation based on statistical laws is further

⁴³⁰ Latourelle, 319.

⁴³¹ Latourelle, 319-320.

⁴³² Latourelle, 320.

⁴³³ Latourelle, 320.

⁴³⁴ Latourelle, 320.

⁴³⁵ Latourelle, 320.

increased when we reflect that in miracles one and the same *antecedent* (for example, the water of the pool at Lourdes) produces the most varied effects: cures of cancer, tuberculosis, gangrene, and so on, and that conversely *one and the same result* is obtained following upon different antecedents: the water of the pool, Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament, application of a relic, recitation of the rosary. The only common denominator is the conjunction of a human petition and a divine response.”⁴³⁶

Finally, all these explanations given here are not more credible than believing in miracles. The statistical laws and unknown forces of nature as people suggest are not credible explanations of what happens in the miraculous events. The porosity of their arguments comes to light when one considers their presupposition.

3.1.4. The Hypothesis of Unknown Forces in the Human Psyche

Modern science has in recent times thrown light on the strong influence of psychic factors on somatic processes. Hence, some people are of the opinion that miraculous cures are simply a result of psychological suggestion or intense religious emotion. It is true that religious issues immensely impact our psychic balance positively or negatively. Nevertheless, that does not mean that it is the correct explanation of such extraordinary events like miraculous cures. René Latourelle raises some objections against this position. On the first instance, he argues that psychology and psychoanalysis have limited influence on the body especially with the aim of effecting cure of certain diseases. According to him, “it is true that psychology and psychoanalysis have discovered the extensive influence of the psychic on the somatic. At the same time, however, they have also shown the limits of this influence. Among the cures effected through psychotherapy, such as those described by P. Janet, we never find cures of tuberculosis, cancer, sclerosis, leprosy, or blindness.”⁴³⁷ His position goes a long way to stress the limitedness of the psychic influence on human body. Furthermore, he emphasises the difference in healing rate of miracles which is almost instantaneous except few which take awhile to heal completely. This instantaneous healing rate is incomparable to the gradual healing rate which is proper to psychological healings. He states as follows, “Treatment by a psychologist or a psychiatrist can bring about a slow, gradual healing of certain functional disturbances or of an organic lesion that had been due to the now healed functional disturbance. But it never brings about an instantaneous or incomparably rapid healing of an organic illness

⁴³⁶ Latourelle, 321-322.

⁴³⁷ Latourelle, 322.

such as leprosy, cancer, or tuberculosis. Even a religious faith systematically called into play (as in sects of the Christian Science type) cannot obtain a result even remotely comparable to a Christian miracle.”⁴³⁸ Come to think of what the power of suggestion has to offer to little kids, and some people who have lost consciousness, the limited power of suggestion comes to light. The weakness of this view is clear from the question asked by René Latourelle: “How is it possible to attribute to the power of suggestion or religious excitement cures benefiting infants a few months or even only a few days old or unconscious dying person?”⁴³⁹

Finally, these religious wonders cannot be just effects of trust or intense religious emotion, because of its uneven distribution, especially among religions. Miraculous cures are noticed more in Catholic Church and her practices, though not known for her intense religious emotion like Islam and Hinduism.⁴⁴⁰ Hence, if miraculous cures were the effect of intense religious emotion and trust, they ought to be distributed widely among the different religious confessions. The issue of suffering and pains is another challenge to the credibility and possibility of miracles in the modern age.

3.1.5. The Problem of Suffering and Miracles

The problem of suffering is indeed a challenge facing everybody both Christians and non-Christians alike. Why is there suffering and pain in the world? If the claim of God working miracles is anything to go by, why has he not miraculously removed all the suffering and pain in the world? Is he not a loving, all-powerful, and good God? This litany of questions seeking for answers will confront any person discussing miracles. The most confusing and challenging one is when the ‘innocent people’ suffer. The correct understanding of suffering from a religious point of view alludes that not all suffering is as a result of sin. “Sickness, however, also strikes the just, and people wonder why. In the Book of Job, this question occupies many pages. ‘While it is true that suffering has meaning as punishment, when it is connected with a fault, it is not true that all suffering is a consequence of a fault and has the nature of a punishment. The figure of the just man Job is a special proof of this in the Old Testament...’ And if the Lord consents to test Job with suffering, he does it to demonstrate the latter's righteousness. The suffering has the character of a test.”⁴⁴¹ In fact, there is no righteous person in the world, though we are ontologically good

⁴³⁸ Latourelle, 322.

⁴³⁹ Latourelle, 322.

⁴⁴⁰ Latourelle, 322.

⁴⁴¹ IPH, 1.

because of the image of God in us. Somewhat we are depraved as a result of the sin of our first parents which increases our tendency to choose evil instead of good. According to prophets Jeremiah, “from the least to the greatest of them, everyone is greedy for unjust gain” (Jer. 6:13a), and the prophet Isaiah says, “we have all become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous deeds are like a filthy cloth” (Isa. 64:6a). Our supposedly good work is not really what it is because of the hidden motive which propels it. In the words of Peter Kreeft, “but though ontologically we are very good, morally we are not. We are sinners. Our world is a battlefield strewn with broken treaties, broken families, broken promises, broken lives, and broken hearts. We are good stuff gone bad, a defaced masterpiece, a rebellious child.”⁴⁴² It would be most unfortunate to think we are well when we are not. Accordingly, when “we no longer think we are desperately ill today, and that is the most desperate illness of all. It is also the reason why suffering is to us a scandal.”⁴⁴³

It is an undeniable fact that our lives here on earth involve suffering which no one would like to entertain. Suffering according to Fredrick Mbiere “forms part and parcel of the very existence of man on earth.”⁴⁴⁴ In the same vein, Pope Benedict XVI concurs that suffering is part of our human existence which people try to extricate themselves from it. Some people suffer because of their fault while others are innocent of whatever they are suffering. In his view, “suffering is a part of our human existence. Suffering stems partly from our finitude, and partly from the mass of sin which has accumulated over the course of history, and continues to grow unabated today.”⁴⁴⁵ Suffering is everywhere and does not discriminate against any race, religion or gender. It is a universal reality that every human being in the world must pass through in one way or the other.

That God is all-powerful does not mean that there is nothing he would not do. He would not contradict himself at least: he cannot make himself to cease to exist. In his book, *The Case for the Faith*, Lee Strobel presented his discussion with Peter Kreeft who argued forcefully in favour of God’s goodness, albeit there still exists evil in the world. Hence he says, “now, the classic defense of God against the problem of evil is that it’s not logically possible to have a free will and no possibility of moral evil. In other words, once

⁴⁴² Peter Kreeft, *Making Sense out of Suffering* (Ann Arbor: Servant Books, 1986), 116.

⁴⁴³ Kreeft, 118.

⁴⁴⁴ Mbiere, *Healing Ministry in Nigeria*, 236.

⁴⁴⁵ Benedict XVI, “*Spe Salvi*, Encyclical Letter,” (November 30, 2007): no. 36, http://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_ben-xvi_enc_20071130_spe-salvi.html.

God chose to create human beings with free will, then it was up to them, rather than to God, as to whether there was sin or not. That's what free will means. Built into the situation of God deciding to create human beings is the chance of evil and, consequently, the suffering that result."⁴⁴⁶ However, this does not entail that God is the architect of evil in the society but in our nature, we are free to choose the good as well as the evil. Most often pains and suffering exist as a result of our choices in the world to cheat, dupe, to be selfish, and to kill.

Humanity is incapable of eliminating all the suffering in the world because of our nature. "This is simply because we are unable to shake off our finitude and because none of us is capable of eliminating the power of evil, of sin which, as we plainly see, is a constant source of suffering. Only God is able to do this: only a God who personally enters history by making himself man and suffering within history."⁴⁴⁷ In the same vein Peter Kreeft contends that "evil" is a mystery and not a problem, in the sense that it means that one cannot solve it. "A problem is solvable, a mystery is not. You can come to the end of a problem, but not of a mystery. Mystery remains mystery, but problem ceases to be problem and becomes solution."⁴⁴⁸ That is to say that one cannot do away with the problem of evil no matter how dogged the person tries. Nevertheless, that does not mean we cannot do anything to alleviate people's suffering. People are encouraged to do everything humanly possible to lighten their suffering and that of others. "These are obligations both in justice and in love, and they are included among the fundamental requirements of the Christian life and every truly human life."⁴⁴⁹ Therefore, we have to do something to alleviate suffering, but as for removing it entirely from the face of the earth, it is beyond our power.

Suffering is vast than one can imagine under normal circumstances, which include physical and moral suffering. Somehow, moral suffering tends to go unnoticed because of its nature. The details of this were led down precisely in the Apostolic Letter of John Paul II, on the "Catholic Teaching on Human Suffering." It states that "the field of human suffering is much wider, more varied, and multi-dimensional. Man suffers in different ways, ways not always considered by medicine, not even in its most advanced specializations. Suffering is something which is still wider than sickness, more complex

⁴⁴⁶ Strobel, *The Case for Faith*, 50.

⁴⁴⁷ Benedict XVI, *Spe Salvi*, 36.

⁴⁴⁸ Kreeft, *Making Sense out of Suffering*, 50.

⁴⁴⁹ Benedict XVI, *Spe Salvi*, 36.

and at the same time still more deeply rooted in humanity itself.”⁴⁵⁰ Moral suffering is often linked to parts of the body as to manifest the ordeal of an individual. “In fact one cannot deny that moral sufferings have a “physical” or somatic element, and that they are often reflected in the state of the entire organism.”⁴⁵¹

There is always this question begging for an answer in every human life, what is the purpose of human suffering? In other words, what is the meaning of the pain people are enduring in their lives? In the words of Pope John Paul II, it is only human beings that know they are suffering and seek to know why this pain in their lives. “Not only does it accompany human suffering, but it seems even to determine its human content, what makes suffering precisely human suffering. It is obvious that pain, especially physical pain, is widespread in the animal world. But only the suffering human being knows that he is suffering and wonders why; and he suffers in a humanly speaking still deeper way if he does not find a satisfactory answer.”⁴⁵² That is the main reason why people query the justice in the pains the ‘innocent people’ pass through. It is really hard to reconcile why they should suffer.

The most fundamental understanding of suffering is through the action of Christ in the world. He suffered immensely on the cross for the redemption of the world, even though he was sinless. “The messianic victory over sickness, as over other human sufferings, does not happen only by its elimination through miraculous healing, but also through the voluntary and innocent suffering of Christ in his passion, which gives every person the ability to unite himself to the sufferings of the Lord.”⁴⁵³ Cardinal Ratzinger as the Prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith articulated the Church’s understanding of human suffering. Thus he says, “the longing for happiness, deeply rooted in the human heart, has always been accompanied by a desire to be freed from illness and to be able to understand the meaning of sickness when it is experienced. This is a human phenomenon, which in some way concerns every person and finds particular resonance in the Church, where sickness is understood as a means of union with Christ and of spiritual purification.”⁴⁵⁴ That is to say, that the idea of suffering may lead to the discovery of

⁴⁵⁰ John Paul II, “*Salvifici Doloris*, an Apostolic Letter,” (February 11, 1984): no. 5, https://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/apost_letters/1984/documents/hf_jp-ii_apl_11021984_salvifici-doloris.html.

⁴⁵¹ John Paul II, 6.

⁴⁵² John Paul II, 9.

⁴⁵³ IPH, 1.

⁴⁵⁴ IPH, 1.

greater spiritual union with others or families. People tend to come closer to each other as to empathise with those who suffer or their families at the time of suffering. According to Peter Kreeft, “a special way in which the physical evil of suffering leads to a spiritual good is through solidarity in suffering.”⁴⁵⁵

The debate about the existence of suffering in the midst of the miraculous claims is not new but an age-old contention which is relevant always. Some of these arguments from the supporters of the possibility of miracles are worth mentioning. First, in line with Job, people should recall our finiteness which is a hindrance towards understanding God’s reason for the distribution and frequency of miracles fully. Second, eschatological hope helps people to know that suffering and pain will not overcome us in the end. Third, there is no gainsaying that our faith, free choice and particular petitions are factors in the miraculous events. Finally, when one understands the primary purpose of miracles which is not precisely to reduce physical suffering in the world but to reveal Divine love and salvation, then the apparent contradiction between miracles and human suffering will be resolved significantly.⁴⁵⁶ By and large, the understanding of suffering in the contemporary period cannot refute the existence of good God. “So suffering does not refute belief in a good God to the ancient mind because a good God might well sacrifice our subjective happiness for our objective happiness. But the modern mind finds it hard to make that distinction (between subjective happiness and objective happiness); therefore, it finds it hard to believe in a good God who lets us suffer.”⁴⁵⁷

The best approach to the relationship between miracles and human suffering is to verify the purpose of miracles. In the first chapter, the study stated that miracles are means of God’s manifestation. In other words, through miraculous events, God communicates his mystery to humanity. It is contrary to some people’s view that if miracles are real, there will be no suffering in the world. Paul Gwynne counters this view and says, “defenders of the concept acknowledge that if special providence and miracles are fundamentally concerned with the material welfare of human beings, then the coherence and credibility of such concepts are seriously compromised by the apparent unfairness of their distribution and the lack of divine action in the face of so much evil. However, it is often pointed out that material prosperity and physical pleasure are not the prime motivations

⁴⁵⁵ Kreeft, *Making Sense out of Suffering*, 72.

⁴⁵⁶ Gwynne, *Special Divine Action*, 292.

⁴⁵⁷ Kreeft, *Making Sense out of Suffering*, 65.

behind SDA, (special Divine action- mine).”⁴⁵⁸ The current trend in the contemporary period sees miracles as a means of success in business, progress in the area of work, a life free of sickness, financial breakthrough, and in fact, complete protection from evil. This pattern of thought is entirely erroneous. This kind of religious views is common among the Pentecostal churches and some mainline churches. Equally, this is noticeable in the global south more than in the global north with a developed economy. The poverty of knowledge and wealth are serious elements encouraging the propagation of such view that with miracles God will provide everything for his people who ask.

On the contrary, the aim behind miracles are not all that earthly bound happiness but eternal happiness which is not devoid of happiness here. Accordingly, God’s prime motivation behind miracle is not merely worldly happiness but to bring people into a loving relationship with him.⁴⁵⁹ God’s nature and ours are not the same. Hence, the uneven distribution of miracles that people point does not hold. God has his way of doing things which humanity is unable to comprehend most often. The reality of our earthly existence embodies pain and suffering as a result of fall of our first parents. This notion is apprehended on the acceptance of the fact that God’s purpose of miracles is not to wipe away suffering but to reveal himself. According to Lee Strobel, “certainly there are times when God allows suffering and deprives us of the lesser good of pleasure in order to help us toward the greater good of moral and spiritual education.”⁴⁶⁰

3.1.6. Hypothesis of Magic

Further attempt to explain the cause of the miraculous events brings one to the issue of magic. “Magic, therefore, is nondifferentiating and leveling delivery of the invisible, spiritual, and hidden into the power of the dominant pragmatism and automatism of everyday life, or the attempt to control without distinction or difference the transcendent reality in the interests and purposes of a visibly pragmatic conduct and fulfilment of life.”⁴⁶¹ The ideology behind magic is an attempt to control the supernatural to yield to one’s desire and directives. They achieve this through religious incantations. It is a belief

⁴⁵⁸ Gwynne, *Special Divine Action*, 289.

⁴⁵⁹ Gwynne, 290.

⁴⁶⁰ Strobel, *The Case for Faith*, 56.

⁴⁶¹ W. Dupré, “Magic,” in *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, 2nd ed., ed. Berard L. Marthaler (Detroit: Gale, 2003), 9:36.

that one can control and manipulate the reality through incantations, prayer-like practices, amulets, and rites, or through special knowledge.⁴⁶²

Moreover, the connection between magic and religious practices is not a clear-cut distinction. Some similarities make it hard for one to give a definitive demarcation. W. Dupré describes the close relation existing between magical and religious practices, when he says “on the one hand, there is transcendent reality that is more or less identical with that of religious experience and is implicitly assumed as a postulate for giving actuality to magical actions; on the other hand, even the religious man, in accordance with his nature and existence, needs tangible or concrete signs (cult, rites, symbols, prayers, knowledge) in order to establish himself in actual relation with God and the Divine.”⁴⁶³

It is clear from the biblical accounts that magic is a serious issue and has an immense influence on the people of Old and New Testaments.(cf. 1Sam 28: 3-7; Deut 18:10-14; Acts 8: 9-24; 13:6-12). There is always an attempt to explain away the miracle stories as a type of ‘magic’. There may be some semblances between miracle and magic, but they are not the same in a strict sense. René Latourelle says that “the hypothesis has only one defect: it fails to compare the style of magicians with the style of Jesus. There are, of course, similarities, chiefly material, between the confrontation of Jesus and that of magicians with illness. The similarities are to be found in the situation of the sick person, certain gestures (laying on of hands, touching of eyes or ears), material things used (saliva), and the presence of a power resident in Jesus on the one hand and in the magician or sorcerer on the other.”⁴⁶⁴ The difference between Jesus’ healings and that of magicians lies in the intention of the act. “The specific difference, however, between Jesus and magicians or sorcerers is to be found in the *meaning* of his miracles and in the constellation of the elements that make them unique. His miracles are first and foremost works of love aimed at the conversion and salvation of human beings. He has no need of miracles that are simply prodigies.... Miracles are worlds removed from magic, which is often practiced in an atmosphere of fear, anxiety, and even death.”⁴⁶⁵ Hence, one can say the difference between them lies in the purpose of the act itself. Magic may take some elements of religion, but it is not a Divine act. Instead, it is a superstitious practice that

⁴⁶² Dupré, 36.

⁴⁶³ Dupré, 36.

⁴⁶⁴ Latourelle, *The Miracles of Jesus and the Theology of Miracles*, 323.

⁴⁶⁵ Latourelle, 324.

has the intention of producing prodigies for its sake. Magical performance is self-serving with the intention to cause wonder only.

3.2. Arguments for the Credibility of Miraculous Claims

The contentious issues, ‘laws of nature’, in the discussion of miracle are not in the dictionary of the people of Israel and Early Christians, so, they are contemporary issues. According to Walter Kasper, “attention in this process is not directed at nature and its laws – the concept of a law of nature is alien to the people of the ancient world. A miracle turns people’s eyes upwards, towards God. Biblical man does not look at reality as nature, but as creation. To him, all reality is ultimately miraculous. The problems presented by miracles for scripture are therefore not scientific, but religious and theological. They concern belief in God and his glorification.”⁴⁶⁶ Any attempt to analyse the issues of miracles outside their proper context will create more problem than solving them.

The mighty deeds of Jesus have the function of authenticating as well as manifesting the arrival of the Messiah. This position is in line with Pope John Paul II’s teaching about miracles of Jesus. According to him, “these deeds accompanied the words, not only following them by way of confirming their authenticity, but frequently preceding them, as the Acts of the Apostles gives us to understand when speaking ‘of all that Jesus did and taught from the beginning’ (Acts 1:1). It was those same works and particularly ‘the marvels and signs’ that testified that ‘the kingdom of God was at hand’ (cf. Mk 1:15), that with Jesus it had entered into the earthly history of humanity and was eager to enter into every human spirit. At the same time they were a witness that he who performed them was truly the Son of God.”⁴⁶⁷ It is a fact that one cannot do away with the miracle stories and still retains the meaning of the Gospel texts. They are part and parcel of the Gospel narratives that came from eyewitnesses’ accounts. Pope John Paul II says that “one must note that they (the wonders and signs) certainly pertain to the integral content of the Gospels as eyewitness testimonies to Christ. It is not possible to exclude the mighty deeds from the Gospel text and context. The analysis not only of the text but also of the context speaks in favor of their ‘historical’ character. It attests that they are facts which actually happened, and that they were really performed by Christ.”⁴⁶⁸

⁴⁶⁶ Kasper, *Jesus the Christ*, 80.

⁴⁶⁷ John Paul II, “The Fact and Significance of Christ’s Miracles, General Audience,” in *Interdisciplinary Encyclopedia of Science and Religion*, (November 11, 1987): para. 3, accessed August 30, 2017, <http://inters.org/John-Paul-II-Catechesis-Miracle-Significance>.

⁴⁶⁸ John Paul II, para. 4.

It is not correct academically to assume a non-existent philosophic consensus against miracles since the matter is still an ongoing debate in philosophy.⁴⁶⁹ On the other hand, some people claimed to be working with the principle of scientific discovery, empirical science, when in fact the matter belongs to the philosophy of science properly. At the same time, science approaches its data through experimenting with the old conjectures. That is to say; they are opened for new explorations and possibilities. In the words of Craig Keener, “Scientists are experts about the normal happenings of nature, but when asking whether something outside the norm happens, they no longer speak as scientists per se, because how to address anomalies or metanormal phenomena is a philosophic question.”⁴⁷⁰ It is not under the jurisdiction of science to say miracles are possible or not; they can do so about repeatable events and not miracles.

3.2.1. Categorical and Confirmatory Arguments

Miracles confirmed the prophecies of old which the people of Israel had been anticipating. If one considers what Christ did in the course of his ministry, the person would agree that miraculous events certified him as the anticipated Messiah foretold long ago. Miracles according to René Latourelle, “signify that the kingdom announced of old has finally arrived and that Jesus of Nazareth is the long awaited Messiah: they fulfill the Scriptures. Considered in the light of a long tradition which sees miracle as one of the principal criteria serving to establish the authenticity of a divine mission, they certify that Christ is the envoy of God and that His word is truthful; what is more, they certify that He is the Son of God, for miracle guarantees this central statement in Christ's message as true.”⁴⁷¹ He has to give an account of himself to the world, and many came to believe in him when he did.

There is need to highlight the confirmatory functions of miracles here in an elaborate manner as René Latourelle stated. “By the physical transcendence and by the religious context which arises, miracle is presented as a sign of God. Explicitly evoked in behalf of a message which is presented as revealed, it signifies that God approves, sanctions, guarantees.”⁴⁷² Miracles bear witness to the authenticity of the message of the Revelation. Hence, “Revelation is communication of a message and invitation to believe this message. The miracle is the divine seal upon the message, attestation to its divine origin; it is not

⁴⁶⁹ Keener, *Miracles*, loc. 3662 of 51259.

⁴⁷⁰ Keener, loc. 3838 of 51259.

⁴⁷¹ Latourelle, *The Theology of Revelation*, 400.

⁴⁷² Latourelle, 402.

the message, but the sign which accredits the witness and authorizes his word. It is God's affirmation on a word which claims to be His."⁴⁷³ Miracles have a role to play concerning the authority and the authenticity of a messenger who claims to represent God. In this scenario, miracle certifies the Church as continuing with the work of the Messiah, the Lord and the head of the Church. Therefore, "the Church claims to continue the existence of Christ-God: historically (apostolicity), morally (sanctity), doctrinally (continuity in faith). The miracle, in her case, must attest that God recognizes the truth of her continuity with Christ and with God; it attests the divine origin of her doctrine and her power for sanctification."⁴⁷⁴ Through so many marvellous works, God has confirmed the Church's claim of representing him here on earth. These miraculous works abound in the history of the Church.

3.2.2. Historicity of Miracles as Evidence of their Credibility

Here, the research will apply the historical methodology in ascertaining the authenticity of the miraculous events. In other words, the historical criteria use by historians in testing the authenticity of their data will be employed in evaluating Jesus' miracles. According to René Latourelle, "if these narratives stand up to the test of criteriology, then historians have no right arbitrarily to pick and choose among these actions or events and label some as "historical" (preaching, trial, and passion of Jesus) while declaring others to be fictitious or legendary. If they make this distinction they do it in the name of principles that have nothing to do with history."⁴⁷⁵ Most scholars are of the opinion that Jesus was a healer and exorcist. There is a strong fact that points towards this assertion than other historical claims about Jesus and earliest Christianity. Historically, miraculous acts of Jesus are in no way subordinate to his preaching and prophetic activities. They are complementary.⁴⁷⁶

It would be wrong to submit the events of the medieval period to the court of the contemporary period. Each epoch has the peculiarity that differentiates it from the other, which is the motive behind the demarcations in time. This idea was in line with Craig Keener's submission when he said, "we should recognize, however, that ancients with different plausibility paradigms may well have experienced genuine events that many

⁴⁷³ Latourelle, 402.

⁴⁷⁴ Latourelle, 402.

⁴⁷⁵ Latourelle, *The Miracles of Jesus and the Theology of Miracles*, 53.

⁴⁷⁶ Keener, *Miracles*, loc. 2424 of 51259.

modern Western interpreters would attribute to different causes.”⁴⁷⁷ Whoever tends to interpret miracles in a naturalistic manner is biased somehow and have taken a position as is common to atheists and deists. “Modern Western interpreters who are skeptical of all such events or read all of them through a purely naturalistic paradigm are hardly neutral in their assumptions.”⁴⁷⁸ They have already assumed a particular position from which they make their pronouncement *a priori*.

Some writers have questioned the *a priori* dismissal of supernatural claims without offering any proof. For them, such approach falls below objective and open-minded endeavour that should guide such enterprise.⁴⁷⁹ Accordingly, “rationalism and empiricism often presented themselves as throwing off an older epistemology of revelatory authority, yet these systems demand (by authority) an *a priori* acceptance of their own epistemologies. Put more simply: everyone has presuppositions. Those who dismiss others’ evidence because those offering it have different presuppositions are being neither charitable nor open-minded, and they short-circuit the possibility of dialogue.”⁴⁸⁰ Certainly, some miracle narratives bear the mark of post-resurrection understanding, but that idea does not foreclose that some are historical facts. “Contemporary exegesis cannot ignore the possibility that some accounts of miracles are possibly ‘post-Paschal re-readings’ of the divinity of Jesus Christ, the full awareness of which the disciples reached only after the Resurrection.”⁴⁸¹ On the contrary, there are other miracles performed by Jesus which bear the mark of historicity which no one can delete from the Gospels without losing the meaning of the narratives.

3.2.2.1. Global Historicity

Many elements in the Scripture indicate the historicity of miracles. Some of these ideas give credence to the fact that the stories of miraculous events are not legends. First, the place of miraculous acts in the Gospel narratives is by no means negligible. They are part and parcel of Christ’s ministry which when excise from the *logia* of Jesus Christ renders the Gospels somewhat meaningless. Equally, his miraculous action made him dear to some people and an enemy to others. These would be hard to explain if these were people’s assumptions.

⁴⁷⁷ Keener, loc. 3470 of 51259.

⁴⁷⁸ Keener, loc. 3472 of 51259.

⁴⁷⁹ Keener, loc. 3531 of 51259.

⁴⁸⁰ Keener, loc. 4901 of 51259.

⁴⁸¹ Tanzella-Nitti, “Miracles,” II.

Second, the content of Gospels would be incoherent without miraculous stories because of the volume miraculous actions of Jesus occupied in the Gospels. For instance, “in the Gospel of Mark, the miracle stories occupy thirty-one percent of the text, or 209 verses out of a total of 666. In the first ten chapters, which are devoted to the public ministry of Jesus (exclusive of the passion), the proportion becomes forty-seven percent (209 verses out of 405).”⁴⁸² The Gospel of Mark would be as good as nothing when one removes the miracle stories.

Third, miracles and words point to the same object, the coming kingdom in the ministry of Jesus. They complement each other in propagating the coming of the Kingdom. In connection with this, René Latourelle says, “it is impossible to conceive of the teaching of Jesus in the Gospels apart from the miracles that accompany it. Miracles and preaching form an indissoluble whole, for both point to one and the same object, namely, the coming of the reign of God: ‘He went about all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and preaching the gospel of kingdom healing every disease and every infirmity among the people (Mt 4:23).’”⁴⁸³ The unity of Jesus’ miracles and preaching is obvious in the Gospel of John which formed the base for the discourses. “The cure of the man born blind shows Christ as the light of the world (Jn 9:5; 1:5; 8:12); the multiplication of the loaves shows him to be the bread that has come down from heaven in order to give life abundantly (Jn 6:32); the raising of Lazarus shows him to be the resurrection and the life (Jn 11:25). If the miracles were excised from the Gospel of John, this fourth Gospel would be destroyed, for it is based entirely on the signs and works of Jesus.”⁴⁸⁴

Fourth, the confirmation of the miraculous works from the enemies’ camp gives much-needed credence to miracle stories. Some of those around Jesus accepted that something extraordinary did take place, but they had a problem with the source of his power (cf. Matt. 12:22, Mark 12:24). In the words of René Latourelle, “what they challenged was not his activity as exorcist and wonder-worker but the authority he claimed for himself on the basis of it.”⁴⁸⁵ These data presented here will help us to consider our position about miraculous events. They will undoubtedly help to enlighten us about the reality of

⁴⁸² Latourelle, *The Miracles of Jesus and the Theology of Miracles*, 54.

⁴⁸³ Latourelle, 54.

⁴⁸⁴ Latourelle, 54-55.

⁴⁸⁵ Latourelle, 55.

miracles in the Bible and subsequent periods. The historicity of miracles is deducible from the data.

“A purely naturalistic paradigm that a priori excludes the possibility of divine causation is not the only interpretative approach to reality held by intelligent people in all cultures, nor is it self-evident to observers in all cultures.”⁴⁸⁶ In connection with this assertion, those who denied miracles without any proof have faith commitment which does not support miracles. Craig Keener is of the opinion “that those who dismiss miracles yet are unwilling to offer solid arguments need to ‘admit that they have a faith commitment which precludes the possibility of miracles.’”⁴⁸⁷ There seems to be an arbitrary application of some of the scientific criteria for certain issues. Take for example the issue of ‘big bang’. The acceptance of ‘big bang theory’ is more on the ground of faith than on an empirical, verifiable conclusion which is based on precise analogy. “Indeed, the argument that precise analogies are necessary for plausibility might challenge contemporary scientists’ affirmation of the big bang, since it is unique in some sense; nevertheless, most scientists believe that evidence is sufficient to overturn such skepticism, as many people believe that evidence is sufficient to overturn skepticism in the case of miracles.”⁴⁸⁸ Be that as it may, “consensus does not determine truth, and many statements of consensus are premature in any case.”⁴⁸⁹

With the transformation of our experience of the world and history since the Enlightenment era, comes two kinds of problems about Jesus’ miracles, historical and scientific problems. Historical scepticism about miracles requires us to examine them with great care, while scientific approach calls for a fundamental reconsideration of the whole concept of miracle.⁴⁹⁰ Critical historical study of miracles’ tradition yielded three main results according to Walter Kasper:

1. Literary criticism discovered the tendency to intensify, magnify and multiply miracles. In Mark’s Gospel, Jesus healed many sick when compared with Matthew’s account; he heals them all (cf. Mark 1:34; Matt. 8:16). In Mark Jairus’ daughter is at the point of death; in Matthew, she is already dead. The healing of one blind man and one possessed becomes the healing of two blind men, and two possessed. The feeding of the 4000 was

⁴⁸⁶ Keener, *Miracles*, loc. 3484 of 51259.

⁴⁸⁷ Keener, loc. 3538 of 51259.

⁴⁸⁸ Keener, loc. 3613 of 51259.

⁴⁸⁹ Keener, loc. 4967 of 51259.

⁴⁹⁰ Kasper, *Jesus the Christ*, 77.

upgraded to 5000, and the seven baskets left over to twelve baskets. If the desire to develop, multiply and intensify is noticeable in the Gospels, it then leads to the assumption that they predated the compilation of Gospels. This desire reduces the value of the source of miracle reports significantly.⁴⁹¹

2. Further reduction results from a comparison with Rabbinic and Hellenistic miracle stories. The miraculous stories in the New Testament are comparable to themes from other ancient sources. There are, for example, Rabbinic and Hellenistic miracle stories of cures, expulsions of demons, raisings from the dead, quellings of storms, and so on. Numerous parallels exist in the case of Jesus' contemporary, Apollonius of Tyana, and many healings are reported in particular from the sanctuary of Asclepius at Epidauros. One gets the impression that the New Testament is transferring non-Christian symbols to Jesus to emphasise his greatness and authority. That is noticeable in the style of miracle stories, a fixed three-part pattern into which the accounts are fitted. First, the failure of previous efforts is described, and the severity of the disease is noted, to intensify the power of the miracle. Then the account of the healing, and finally, we are given the names of the witnesses who saw the miracle and confirmed it.⁴⁹² Nevertheless, some significant differences exist between the miracles of Jesus and the ones reported in the antiquity; Jesus does not work miracles for money, to punish, or for a show. Be that as it may, it is hardly possible to reject all the Rabbinic and Hellenistic miracle reports as legends and then accept the New Testament accounts at face value as historical. The reason is simply that of the parallels of the miracle stories (Hellenistic and Jesus).⁴⁹³

3. Some miracle stories turn out in the light of form criticism to be a post-Easter reading of the miracles of Jesus Christ. The stilling of the storm, the transfiguration, Jesus' walking on the lake, the feeding of the four (or five) thousand and the miraculous draught of fishes, are some of the miracle stories seen as a post-resurrection understanding. The result of all this is that we must describe many of the Gospel miracle stories as legendary. Legends of this sort should be examined less for their historical than for their theological content.⁴⁹⁴ It would be over generalisation to conclude from the views above that there are no historically authenticated miracles of Jesus. There are many reasons for saying so. "Even a critical historical consideration of the gospel miracle tradition leads to the

⁴⁹¹ Kasper, 77.

⁴⁹² Kasper, 78.

⁴⁹³ Kasper, 78.

⁴⁹⁴ Kasper, 78.

conclusion that a historical core of the miracle tradition cannot be disputed. Jesus performed extraordinary actions, which amazed his contemporaries. These included curing various diseases and symptoms which at the time were thought to be signs of possession. On the other hand, the probability is that we need not take the so-called ‘nature miracles’ as historical.”⁴⁹⁵

In the contemporary era, there is an effort to explain miraculous cures psychologically. In the words of Walter Kasper, “some commentators propose that Jesus’ miracles should be seen as ‘suggestion therapy’. That would give us the possibility of interpreting the miracles of Jesus theologically as acts of God while at the same time giving them a psychological interpretation in terms of the charismatic power which went out from Jesus and the faith he inspired. This raises the question of the mode of reality to which we are to allocate the events the miracle accounts relate.”⁴⁹⁶ Historically, one can examine and authenticate the miraculous actions of Jesus by applying the criteria used by scholars and historians to establish historical Jesus.

3.2.2.2. Criteria of Historical Authenticity

According to René Latourelle, the ‘criteria of historical authenticity’, means “*norms* that are applied to the Gospel material and make it possible to test the historical solidity of the miracle stories and pass judgement on the authenticity or non-authenticity of their content.”⁴⁹⁷ Up till now, under the influence of form criticism and the history of religions, exegetes have used these criteria often to test the *logia*. However, their application to the miracles of Jesus has proved to be not only legitimate but fruitful.⁴⁹⁸ John Paul II in his reflection on the works of Christ said that one cannot extricate the aspect of signs and wonders and still retains the full meaning of the Gospels. And thus he says, “it is not possible to exclude the mighty deeds from the Gospel text and context. The analysis not only of the text but also of the context speaks in favor of their ‘historical’ character. It attests that they are facts which actually happened, and that they were really performed by Christ. Whoever approaches the matter with intellectual honesty and scientific expertise cannot dispose of them in a few words as simply later inventions.”⁴⁹⁹

⁴⁹⁵ Kasper, 78, 79.

⁴⁹⁶ Kasper, 79.

⁴⁹⁷ Latourelle, *The Miracles of Jesus and the Theology of Miracles*, 56.

⁴⁹⁸ Latourelle, 56.

⁴⁹⁹ John Paul II, “The Fact and Significance of Christ’s Miracles, General Audience,” para. 4.

Miracles are meaningful in the context of religion only. According to Craig Keener, “many thinkers appeal to the special religious context of miracles for their significance. Hume’s appeal to general experience cannot counter claims to miracles within a theistic framework, since theists do not deny general experience but argue that the relevant cases for comparison are those involving divine activity.”⁵⁰⁰ Indeed, treating miraculous events outside religious perspective will turn out to be another thing altogether.

There are many problems militating against the historical credibility of Jesus’ mighty deeds as mentioned earlier. Some accounts tend to magnify and exaggerate the miracle stories about Jesus as to mystify him and thereby reduced their historical credibility. Nevertheless, that does not mean that Jesus’s miraculous actions are completely fabricated stories. There is ample evidence that his miracles are historically credible. The application of these criteria: multiple attestation, discontinuity, continuity, style of Jesus, internal intelligibility of the stories, divergent interpretations, substantial agreement, necessary explanation, and convergence and coherence, on the Jesus’ miracle stories will make it possible to examine their historical and credible authenticity.

3.2.2.2.1. The Criterion of Multiple Attestation

Historians make use of this criterion; that is the agreement of testimonies from various sources that are not mutually related, for their ideas deserve to be accepted as authentic. The certainty arises from the convergence and independence of the sources.⁵⁰¹ In the case of the Gospels, of course, behind the diversity and multiplicity of the written sources, there is a common source, the early preaching. However, other facts no less important and well-known provided a counterbalance: 1. the sources for the miracles are the Gospels, Acts and Letters. 2. The tensions between Jews and Gentiles and between various local communities point to the regional nature of the early Church. 3. The first Churches consistently rejected apocryphal writings in favour of four and only four Gospels.⁵⁰² “If these points are taken into account, the criterion of multiple attestation can be regarded as applicable, especially when referred to the main characteristics of the person, preaching, and activity of Jesus. Thaumaturgic activity is certainly one of these characteristics. The fact that Jesus worked miracles is attested in almost all the sources we have.”⁵⁰³ The synoptic Gospels and Gospel of John contain a sizeable story about the

⁵⁰⁰ Keener, *Miracles*, 4332 of 51259.

⁵⁰¹ Latourelle, *The Miracles of Jesus and the Theology of Miracles*, 56.

⁵⁰² Latourelle, 57.

⁵⁰³ Latourelle, 57.

miracles of Jesus. Even John's Gospel has it that not all the miracles of Jesus were put down. In the Gospel of Mark which serves as a direct or indirect source for the Gospels of Matthew and Luke, some stories are well developed while others are in a summary form.

Moreover, "Q (*Quelle*), an ancient source common to canonical Luke and Matthew, also contains *logia* referring to the miracles of Jesus. For example: the healing of the centurion's servant (Mt 8:5-13; Lk 7:1-10); the answer of Jesus to the emissaries of John the Baptist (Mt 11:5 and Lk 7:22). Q also contains the important *logion* against the three lake-towns that had not repented despite the many miracles which they had witnessed (Lk 10: 13-15; Mt 11: 21-24)."⁵⁰⁴ The presence of miracle stories in different records which point to the same narrative gives credence to the historicity of the miracle narratives in the Bible.

It is on record that those who opposed Jesus did not reject his signs and wonders but attributed them to the power of Beelzebul. In other words, they acknowledged the fact of miracles but questioned the source of his power. "In this regard it is well to observe that these facts are not only attested to and narrated by the apostles and disciples of Jesus, but in many cases they are admitted by his opponents....But the most important thing for us at the moment is the fact that even Jesus' opponents could not deny his 'mighty deeds, wonders and signs' as reality-as facts which had actually taken place."⁵⁰⁵ The multiple records and presentations in different accounts lend credence to the authenticity of the fact of miracles. Those who reported them did that from their perspectives.

On the question whether Jesus did any work that is considered miraculous? Denis Edward provided the answer that "the miracles are very *widely attested to* in the sources we have for Jesus' ministry. Every Gospel source, including Mark, Q (the non-Markan material common to Matthew and Luke), the material found only in Matthew, that found only in Luke, and John, as well as every evangelist in editorial summaries, and the Jewish writer Josephus all witness to Jesus as a miracle worker. Jesus' miracles are attested to, as well, in different kinds of literary forms: in exorcism stories, healing stories, nature miracles, summary statements, parables, dispute stories, and Jesus' mandate to his disciples instructing them to heal. This level of attestation is a powerful argument for

⁵⁰⁴ Latourelle, 57.

⁵⁰⁵ John Paul II, "The Fact and Significance of Christ's Miracles, General Audience," para. 5.

historicity.”⁵⁰⁶ Finally, René Latourelle surmises “thus the Synoptics (especially Mark), Q, the Gospel of John, the Acts of the Apostles, the letter to the Hebrew, the Jewish tradition, and the apocrypha bear unanimous witness to the fact that Jesus worked miracles. I emphasize once again the point that the theme of miracles appears not only in these sources but also in very different literary genres within them: disputes (Mk 2:1-12; Jn 9:1-41), summaries (Mk 6:12-13), and discourses (Jn 6:11).”⁵⁰⁷ All these are clear signs of multiple attestation which solidly ground the historical nature of the miracles of Jesus. The intention of Jesus’ actions and deeds differentiates his miracles from other alleged miracles from other miracle workers in the ancient Near East.

3.2.2.2. The Criterion of Discontinuity

According to René Latourelle, “‘a datum of the Gospels may be regarded as authentic if it is irreducible either to concepts in Judaism or to concepts of the early Church or, even better, to both together.’ The point of the criterion is that even though Jesus was a man of his time and very much at home in his social environment and in the Jewish tradition, he was nonetheless a special, *unique* being without precedent in the history of Israel and without any possible duplicate in the subsequent history of the race.”⁵⁰⁸ This uniqueness manifests in his miraculous actions and preaching during his earthly ministry. Unlike the status quo, where prophets healed in the name of God; he healed people in his name. Even after his death and resurrection the apostles continued the healing ministry in his name. This criterion applies to Jesus’ miraculous actions and the meaning of his miracles. He says to the leper: “I will; be clean” (Mark 1:14), to the daughter of Jairus: “Little girl, I say to you arise” (Mark 5:41). René Latourelle says “before Christ, then, no prophet worked miracles in his own name; after Christ, the apostles refer to him and act in his name. He alone dares to act in his own name. He is historically unique in the way he addresses the Father as ‘Abba’ and in the way he works miracles in his own name.”⁵⁰⁹

It is noticeable that some of the miraculous stories contain some elements of the Jewish traditions. Under normal circumstances, some cultural trappings that appeared in the narrative would not have surfaced if the community of believers were to fabricate the stories. Their presence bolstered the credibility of Jesus’ miracles. “The criterion of *embarrassment* comes into play in material that the Christian community would have

⁵⁰⁶ Edwards, *How God Acts*, 78.

⁵⁰⁷ Latourelle, *The Miracles of Jesus and the Theology of Miracles*, 58.

⁵⁰⁸ Latourelle, 58-9.

⁵⁰⁹ Latourelle, 59.

found awkward and therefore was unlikely to have introduced. This criterion has a limited application in the Beelzebul incident, where Jesus' exorcisms lead to the charge that he is in league with the devil (Mark 3:20-30; Matt 12:22-32)."⁵¹⁰ Such elements give credence to the fact of the miracles of Jesus. For instance, Jesus touching lepers to cure them and Sabbath healings are contrary to the known Jewish tradition. "At the same time, these miracles represent an eruption of something new which is breaking away from many of the usual Jewish expectations and dispositions, and they therefore, cannot be interpreted as a simple literary construction that arose from the community in which Jesus lived and worked."⁵¹¹ His actions are a clear departure from the status quo, and that lends credence to the authenticity and historicity of his marvellous work.

The story of healers abound in the ancient Near Eastern culture and tradition, but Jesus stood out among others as the one who preached and healed in his name. Moreover, the most distinctive feature of Jesus's miracles "is the picture of one who not only preached in parables proclaiming the kingdom of God but also worked miracles that actualised his proclamation."⁵¹²

3.2.2.2.3. The Criterion of Continuity

The criterion of continuity points to the custom and tradition of people. This criterion serves as evidence of the historical character of Jesus' miracles. According to Giuseppe Tanzella-Nitti, "the criterion of continuity—which attributes a greater value to the narrations that demonstrate a continuity with the historical-contextual surroundings in which they are believed to have occurred—seems to be verified in the case of miracles by the close connection between miracles and the "preaching of the kingdom," which was considered by all to be the prophetic activity *par excellence*."⁵¹³ In the same vein, René Latourelle says that Protestant and Catholic exegetes agree that the teaching of Jesus is about the decisive inbreaking kingdom of God. "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand", says the Lord (Mt 4:17). The theme of the inbreaking kingdom of God is undoubtedly characteristic of the original message of Jesus. The *logia* and mighty deeds of Jesus which point to the reality of the kingdom of God should be seen as authentic.⁵¹⁴

⁵¹⁰ Edwards, *How God Acts*, 79.

⁵¹¹ Tanzella-Nitti, "Miracles," II.

⁵¹² Edwards, *How God Acts*, 79.

⁵¹³ Tanzella-Nitti, "Miracles," II.

⁵¹⁴ Latourelle, *The Miracles of Jesus and the Theology of Miracles*, 60.

Miracles are signs of the coming kingdom and what it looks like. The miraculous actions of Jesus are part and parcel of his proclamation of the good news. “In the preaching of Jesus the miracles are in fact inseparable from the theme of the inauguration of the kingdom; they are performed as signs that manifest the coming and true nature of the kingdom which the prophets had foretold. They are a component part of the kingdom. For the kingdom is not something static, but a dynamic force that effectively changes the human condition and establishes the lordship of Christ over all things, including bodies and the cosmos.”⁵¹⁵ This idea was manifested in the Jesus’ answer to the disciples of John the Baptist which is in line with the prophecy of the old. (cf. Isa. 35:5-6; 29:18; 26:19, Luke 7:22; 4: 16-21). Accordingly, miracles are signs of Divine power, love of God, the coming kingdom of God, and the transformation of the passing world. One of the contemporary Catholic theologians, René Latourelle, says, “miracles are signs of the salvation that comes through Jesus, for they are the power of God in the very act of conquering Satan (Lk 10:8-9; 10:18-19; Mk 16:17-18). Thus miracles unaccompanied by the exhortation to acknowledge the coming kingdom and the person who has come to establish it are meaningless; they are inexplicable events and nothing more. That is why when Christ works a miracle he also exhorts to conversion and to faith in his mission.”⁵¹⁶ They are part and parcel of the work of Jesus clarifying and authenticating his teaching about the inbreaking kingdom of God. Finally, “miracles are quite often associated with the demand for an interior conversion, and they therefore stand out as a salvific work upon the body and the soul. They are followed by an invitation to proclaim the works of God, glorify Him, and bear witness to Him with one’s life. All of these are elements which place the activity of Jesus in continuity with that of the teachers of Israel (cf. *Mt* 11:20-24; *Lk* 10:13-15).”⁵¹⁷

3.2.2.2.4. Style of Jesus

The style of Jesus according to René Latourelle, means “the inimitable impress of his person on everything he says and does; it is his way of being and acting.... The style of Jesus in performing his miracles is the same as his style in teaching; in both areas it is marked by simplicity, restraint, and authority.”⁵¹⁸ Some characteristics of Jesus miraculous actions made them peculiar and unique to him. Some of the characteristics of

⁵¹⁵ Latourelle, 60.

⁵¹⁶ Latourelle, 61.

⁵¹⁷ Tanzella-Nitti, “Miracles,” II.

⁵¹⁸ Latourelle, *The Miracles of Jesus and the Theology of Miracles*, 61.

Jesus mighty deeds are as follows: “the intervention of Jesus is always necessary; in this regard we observe that he does not choose among diseases in order to accept the easier ones and reject the more difficult ones.... Christ does not work punitive wonder in order to dazzle the superstitious or exploit their fears; the Gospels differ in this respect from the apocrypha.... On the other hand, Christ refuses the petition of James and John who want to call down fire from heaven that will destroy an inhospitable village. He will have nothing to do with this kind of flashy and meaningless demonstration.”⁵¹⁹

More still, these miracles took place under the context of religion and manifested the trust of the people to the ability of Jesus to heal them. The individual or their friends or relatives’ appeal and petition to Jesus for healing is a clear manifestation of this trust. “The essential element in every miracle, however, is the encounter with Christ and his mission of salvation, and the encounter with the kingdom which in Christ is forcing its way in among human beings.”⁵²⁰ Here lies the meaning and purpose of miracles in which the knowledge and the power of the coming kingdom of God are laid bare. “The restraint that marks the wonder-working activity of Jesus is in harmony with the context and religious meaning of his miracles. He shows no self-centeredness; he never performs miracles in order to call attention to himself. He refuses the flashy exhibitions and amusing which Herod looks for from him.”⁵²¹

The mighty works of Jesus manifest his love and sympathy for those who are suffering unlike what magicians and others in their group would do. The latter most often than not would like to show off their powers. Giuseppe Tanzella-Nitti says that the historical actuality of miracles of Jesus is reinforced by his style and manner of his actions. Against this background, he has this to say about the styles of Jesus’ miracles, “his works arise from a sensitivity toward human suffering rather than from the desire to perform flashy deeds. His activity is oriented toward the good of the person and not toward obtaining public recognition for himself. Even when the miracles are worked with the aim that those present will believe in His divine origin in the Father (as in the resurrection of Lazarus, *Jn* 11:42), their ultimate scope is not the human glory of Christ but rather the conversion of hearts toward the new logic of the Kingdom of God (see *Mt* 12:28).”⁵²² Jesus miracles are not meant to attract attention to himself or coerce belief in him and his

⁵¹⁹ Latourelle, 61-2.

⁵²⁰ Latourelle, 62.

⁵²¹ Latourelle, 62-3.

⁵²² Tanzella-Nitti, “Miracles,” II.

preaching. He tries to mellow it down as to avoid unnecessary attention to his person. Accordingly, Giuseppe Tanzella-Nitti elucidated more on the historical nature of the miracles of Jesus and said “that the primitive Church rejected several narrations of the life of Jesus, classifying them as ‘apocryphal’ gospels, precisely due to an abnormal presence of prodigious deeds. The deeds related in the apocryphal gospels differ from the miracles narrated in the “canonical” Gospels above all because they do not reflect a salvific aim and call to conversion. Instead, the miracles in the apocryphal gospels emphasize marvelous actions performed solely to arouse awe, or at times they are performed without sufficient discernable motivations.”⁵²³

Finally, the characteristics of Jesus’ miraculous works are enough to show how they differ from the other stories of prodigies that are related at the level of literary structure. As a matter of fact, “analogy does not imply genealogy. The style of the miracles of Jesus is unparalleled, as is that of his words.”⁵²⁴ The style of Jesus extraordinary actions is consistent with his words and person. Moreover, the unity of words, person, and actions manifest the internal intelligibility of the miraculous events.

3.2.2.2.5. The Criterion of Internal Intelligibility of the Stories

Internal intelligibility of the miraculous narratives entails, “when a datum of the Gospel fits perfectly into its immediate and mediate context and, in addition, is completely coherent in its internal structure (in all the elements that make it up), it can be assumed that the datum is authentic.”⁵²⁵ Internal intelligibility of the miracle narratives depends on the other criteria to serve as a criterion of historical authenticity. The literary nature of this criterion makes it dependent on others like multiple attestations, discontinuity, and continuity.⁵²⁶

There is no way one could omit the miraculous stories without distorting the account of the whole Gospel narratives. The Gospels are the ‘records’ of the words and deeds of Jesus during his earthly life. They contain the evidence of his divinity and foundation of the work of the apostles later on. Hence, we have to note that foundation of the apostolic proclamation, *kérygma*, is the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Moreover, resurrection is the miracle of all miracles. “In this proclamation Jesus’ miracles take on

⁵²³ Tanzella-Nitti, II.

⁵²⁴ Latourelle, *The Miracles of Jesus and the Theology of Miracles*, 63.

⁵²⁵ Latourelle, 63.

⁵²⁶ Latourelle, 64.

the important role of testifying to the divine identity of the subject. Upon this depended, in the preaching of the apostles, the truth of redemption and its universal effects for the human race. If the Gospels were written in order to bear witness to the divinity of Jesus Christ (*Mk* 1:1; *Lk* 1:1-4; *Jn* 20:30-31), the accounts of miracles constituted an intrinsic part of such a witness.⁵²⁷ It is not probable that one will retain the content and meaning of the Gospels without miracle narratives. The narratives about the restorations to life by Jesus which are attested by Gospels of John, (raising of Lazarus), Mark (raising of Jairus' daughter), and Luke (the raising of the son of the widow Nain (*Luke* 7:11-17), are consistent with his resurrection.⁵²⁸

Furthermore, the fact about the empty tomb of Jesus Christ reported in more than one account, points to the miracle of resurrection. Even though there are many controversies about the empty tomb but the available information strongly points to its historicity and intelligibility. "If Jesus was in fact buried in Joseph's tomb, then (barring his resurrection) either the story of the discovery of his empty tomb is legendary or fictitious, or else there is some natural explanation for his tomb's being vacant."⁵²⁹ The credibility of the burial story, Pauline account of Jesus burial, and the discovery of the tomb by women support the theory about the empty tomb and then make it highly probable. Interestingly, the earliest Jewish reaction to Jesus' resurrection lends credence to the fact of the empty tomb. The internal intelligibility, when supported by the criterion of multiple attestations is a reliable guarantee of historical authenticity.⁵³⁰

3.2.2.2.6. Divergent Interpretation and Substantial Agreement

This phenomenon is used in historical studies to ascertain the authenticity of data. In the words of René Latourelle, the "variations of interpretation and divergences in details are due to editorial intervention, while the weight and influence of the tradition makes itself known in the substantial agreement on the reality of the facts that have been handed on and acknowledged by all. This substantial agreement on facts in the midst of redactional differences and even differences of interpretation is a solid indication of historicity. History and law constantly rely on this type of argument. Too complete an agreement begets distrust, while substantial agreement despite differences inspires trust."⁵³¹ For

⁵²⁷ Tanzella-Nitti, "Miracles," II.

⁵²⁸ Latourelle, *The Miracles of Jesus and the Theology of Miracles*, 64.

⁵²⁹ William Lane Craig, "The Empty Tomb of Jesus," in *In Defense of Miracles*, eds. R. Douglas Gievet and Gary R. Habermas (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1997), 251.

⁵³⁰ Latourelle, *The Miracles of Jesus and the Theology of Miracles*, 66.

⁵³¹ Latourelle, 66.

instance, the healing of an epileptic child in the synoptic Gospels is presented in three versions. “Luke sees the miracle as an action inspired by the compassion of Jesus for the tearful father (Lk 9:42). In keeping with the overall perspective adoption in his Gospel Mark sees the cure as a striking victory of Jesus over Satan (Mk 9: 14-27). Matthew, finally, emphasizes the need of faith in the mission of Jesus (Mt 17:20): the disciples were unable to deliver the possessed child because they lacked this faith. The several interpretations, all valid, are made possible by the richness of the event itself with its unlimited intelligibility.”⁵³²

In general, the enemies of Jesus do not deny the actuality of the miracles but question his source of power. They have seen them but would rather interpret them to suit their presupposition. “The criticisms clearly go along other lines. This man, his adversaries affirm, ‘is not of God’ because the power to cast out demons has been given to Him by the devil himself, or because He worked miracles on the Sabbath in transgression of the Law. It is not that those who ‘do not believe’ deny His miracles.”⁵³³ Unfortunately, their interpretation is far removed from the reality on the ground. It is an attempt to deny the obvious, that Jesus is the Son God and a miracle worker.

3.2.2.2.7. The Criterion of Necessary Explanation

This criterion is regularly applied in history, legal matters, theology, and most of the human sciences. It says, “if a sizable collection of facts or data requiring a coherent and sufficient explanation are given an explanation that clarifies and harmoniously combines all these elements (which would otherwise remain puzzling), then we may conclude that we are in the presence of an authentic datum (a deed, action, attitude, or statement of Jesus).”⁵³⁴ This criterion requires that one accounts intelligibly for the coherence existing between different data in a group.

On the issue of miracles, there is need to outline these facts which the sceptics can hardly deny. In fact, it is necessary that whoever is doubting the historicity and credibility of miracles of Jesus to account for these facts. René Latourelle enumerates them as follows: 1. “We must explain the intense excitement which Jesus aroused in the people during the Galilean phase of his ministry and even as late as the beginning of the passion (triumphal entrance into Jerusalem). 2. We must explain the fact that Jesus was regarded as a great

⁵³² Latourelle, 67.

⁵³³ Tanzella-Nitti, “Miracles,” II.

⁵³⁴ Latourelle, *The Miracles of Jesus and the Theology of Miracles*, 67.

prophet (Mk: 8 28) and even as the promised prophet whom the entire nation was awaiting (Dt 18:18) 3. We must explain the exceptionally important place of the miracles in the Synoptic tradition and in the Gospel of John. 4. We must explain the fact that the chief priests and the Pharisees wanted to get rid of Jesus precisely because he worked miracles and was a threat to their power.”⁵³⁵ 5. “We must explain the close and constant connection between the miracles and the central message of Jesus on the definitive coming of the kingdom. 6. We must explain the fact that the primitive kerygma invokes the miracles of Jesus when it presents him as Messiah and Son of God (Acts 2:22; 10:38-39; Jn 20:30). 7. We must explain the close connection between, on the one hand, the claim of Jesus to the Son of the Father, sharing knowledge and power with him, and Savior from sin and death, and, on the other, his miracles which show his dominion precisely over sickness, sin, and death. Once again, there is continuity with word and action.”⁵³⁶

It is one thing to reject the narratives about Jesus’ miracles and another thing to explain the actions and attitude of people during his earthly ministry. They need an explanation that would counter the position of every theistic being. On the other hand, “once the reality of the miracles of Jesus is admitted, everything is explained and becomes intelligible. If that reality is denied, everything becomes a puzzle without any real explanation.”⁵³⁷ That is to say that every other fact lacks coherence and cannot converge at any point at all.

3.2.2.3. Convergence and Coherence

The sayings of Jesus and his actions are entirely in agreement. Hence, accepting only the *logia* as the authentic is being economical with the truth. “On top of this, the criterion of *coherence* supports the argument that Jesus was seen as a miracle worker. There is coherence between Jesus’ exorcisms and his sayings, between his healings and sayings, and between the signs and the discourses in John’s Gospel. In a more general way, Jesus’ miracles are coherent with the picture of one who gained a large number of disciples and aroused much interest.”⁵³⁸

It is not abnormal to hear that a transcendental being performs wonder, rather it will be abnormal that such a being lacks such power. Christ manifested that he has the power to

⁵³⁵ Latourelle, 67.

⁵³⁶ Latourelle, 68.

⁵³⁷ Latourelle, 68.

⁵³⁸ Edwards, *How God Acts*, 78-9.

heal and forgive sins during his ministry here on earth. Certainly, “if Christ is God among us, it is not surprising that his presence should be ‘signalled’ by works of power such as his resurrection and miracles. The real surprise would be the lack of such works. A God who gave no sign of his divine identity would elude all human perception of him and would not call human freedom into play in any way.”⁵³⁹ The intelligibility of the mighty deeds of Christ will be clear when one stops judging Divine actions with human standards. The fact that miraculous actions of Jesus did not follow human conception of how things should be, cannot make them unintelligent. In the words of René Latourelle, “if God, in the person of Jesus, intervenes in history and the human world, can anyone deny that such an intervention is intrinsically intelligible, but intelligible in a way that is properly divine and therefore not reducible to our simplistic human notions of the form such an intervention should take?”⁵⁴⁰ Finally, miracles of Jesus are coherent and intelligible factors that led to his death on the cross. His mighty deeds especially Sabbath healings significantly contributed to his death.

3.3. Summary

This chapter has dealt with the issue of contemporary challenges to the possibility and credibility of miracles arising from the philosophical and scientific background. The paradigm shifts in the area of knowledge have affected people’s view of many things including supernatural events. Sequel to this, some people tend to reject the idea of supernatural intervention in the world. These people claimed that laws of nature are unalterable and account for every action in the world. This idea reached climax in the nineteenth century but is still strong in the contemporary period because science has not fulfilled its claim of accounting for every reality. Moreover, atheists and deists views which are philosophical could not provide an answer for the reality on the ground. They rejected the occurrence of miracles on the ground that God does not exist and that the world is unalterable respectively. “Some, interpreting the miracle narratives in a strictly literal sense, strive to find natural explanations; others cast serious doubts on their historical value; and still others, accepting their historical value, explain them as magical practices or empirical curative treatments or gestures common in those days. Some of these attempts to understand miracle stories are vitiated by the basic prejudice that

⁵³⁹ Latourelle, *The Miracles of Jesus and the Theology of Miracles*, 68-9.

⁵⁴⁰ Latourelle, 69.

miracles are theologically and philosophically impossible.”⁵⁴¹ A situation whereby any person or group would dismiss any idea a priori is unacceptable in the field learning.

The development in the field of knowledge has warranted some people to abandon their hard-line stance against supernatural activity in the world. Meanwhile, the issue of Divine intervention in the world is meaningful in its proper context, religion and theology. An event is miraculous if there is a link to the Divine, outside which there is nothing like miracle. It is the opinion of Karl Rahner that “we must always keep in mind that a miracle is not simply intended to be an event within a neutral world of things which would have to be equally accessible and meaningful for everyone. It is rather a call into the uniqueness of the concrete situation of a particular person.”⁵⁴² Miracles are meaningful in a religious context in which people believe in the ability of God to intervene in the world and its affair according to his will. In the words of Winfried Corduan, “believers identify an event as a miracle when two features come together—the event is unusual enough to point them in the direction of expected divine agency, and (given their worldview) there is enough reason to believe that God has in fact intervened in this particular case.”⁵⁴³

The idea that belief tilts towards greater evidence and does not wait up until every fact is proved hundred percent guided the arguments in favour of the possibility of miracles. Otherwise, that would mean living in the utopian world of ideas which is contrary to the reality on the ground. Hence, “one can responsibly believe in miracles without having *proof* that miracles have happened. The demand for proof as a condition for believing is unrealistically and unnecessarily high. Much of what we believe results from thinking about what makes the most sense in light of all the evidence at our disposal.”⁵⁴⁴ That is to say, if the evidence at one’s disposal for the possibility of miracles is greater than its impossibility one should not postpone judgement. From all indications, no one can have complete evidence of what he or she wants before taking a certain position in life. Rather what people do is to evaluate the evidence before them and decide what to accept. In other words, people follow the more credible and rational option in their decisions always. Miracles are incredible if one does not believe in the existence of God who creates and sustains the world on a daily basis. However, if one does, the person has to accept the

⁵⁴¹ Sant and Collins, “Miracle,” 663.

⁵⁴² Rahner, *Foundation of Christian Faith*, 262.

⁵⁴³ Winfried Corduan, “Recognizing a Miracle” in *In Defense of Miracles*, R. Douglas Geivett and Gary R. Habermas, (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1997), 105.

⁵⁴⁴ R. Douglas Geivett and Gary R. Habermas, eds. “Conclusion: Has God Acted in the History?” in *In Defense of Miracles* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1997), 277.

reality of miraculous events as coming from God who sustains the world daily and is responsible for the very laws that govern the physical world.⁵⁴⁵

The possibility and credibility of miracles especially that of Jesus was considered in the context of his person and works. “His supernatural feats took place in a context charged with religious significance because he performed his miracles and exorcism as signs of the in-breaking of the kingdom of God into the history, and they served as an authentication of his message. And his resurrection comes as the climax to his own unparalleled life and ministry and his radical claims to divine authority which got him crucified.”⁵⁴⁶ Historically, the mighty deeds of Jesus Christ when scrutinised with the criteria proper to historical research proved to be credible. The application of the historical methodology on the data from Jesus’ miracle narratives proved that they were not legends.

The aim of this chapter, the possibility and credibility of miracles, is not to coerce any person to believe in the miracles, instead to show the historical authenticity of the fact of miracles. Suffice it to conclude with the words of René Latourelle on the proof that “it does not claim to convince or compel those who think they must reject the very possibility of miracles. It simply asks them to acknowledge the principles behind their decision and to acknowledge honestly the problem posed by the miracle stories recorded in our Gospels. In the case of those who admit the hypothesis of an intervention of God in history in order to save human beings, the proof can alert them to read the signs which (it is argued) show that this intervention has in fact occurred. In the case of believers, it is such as to inspire confidence in the Gospels and to strengthen their faith in him whom they confess to be their Lord.”⁵⁴⁷ The next chapter will take care of the characteristics and functions of genuine miracles. In other words, the discussion is going to focus on the functions and how to recognise miraculous events with particular reference to the teachings of the Catholic Church.

⁵⁴⁵ Strobel, *The Case For Faith*, 83.

⁵⁴⁶ Strobel, 92.

⁵⁴⁷ Latourelle, *The Miracles of Jesus and the Theology of Miracles*, 69.

CHAPTER FOUR

RECOGNITION OF MIRACLES AND THEIR FUNCTIONS

This chapter deals with the recognition of miracles and their functions from the contemporary Catholic theological point of view. First, how to recognise authentic private Revelations will occupy our attention. After that, the research will consider what the magisterium has said about miracles and the trial of miracles during the process of beatification and canonization. Just as Guiseppe Tanzella-Nitti says that “if theology rashly discarded the problem without precisely identifying what a miracle is or is not, it would fail to assign miracles any specific role in the dynamic process of educating towards faith, thereby also undermining the value they have within the economy of divine revelation.”⁵⁴⁸ Consequent upon this assertion, the final section is going to analyse in details the functions of miracles in the life of every Christian and the Church.

The necessity of critical, open-minded and theological reflection on miracles is urgent in this contemporary era more than ever. First, there seems to be overemphasis on the mental representations and doctrinal formulation of faith to the detriment of its experiential aspect. Some people still value the experiential aspect of faith which serves as an aid to it than the sophisticated doctrinal ideas meant for those who are learned. The probability is that stressing only the intellectual doctrinal formulations may lead to separation of faith from its originating and supporting source for some people. Miracles are traditionally a source and experience of God’s grace.⁵⁴⁹ Second, the fact that some of the miraculous claims are frauds does not entail that there are no legitimate miraculous events. Such would be overgeneralisation if that were to be the case. The fact that many honest Christians have interest in the special Divine acts is enough to necessitate theological reflections on miracles. Third, most people who are not learned in the ideals of Christianity tend to see mysticism as almost exclusive with miracles. The consequence of such view is the belief that these events have a higher sacred value than other experiences of God. The tendency is to place more value and interest on the spectacular external manifestation of God than other genuine means of an encounter with the Divine. In other words, the sacraments of the Church, and our ordinary acts of faith, hope and love are second to miraculous experiences.⁵⁵⁰ This particular understanding of miracles is the main

⁵⁴⁸ Tanzella-Nitti, “Miracles,” V.

⁵⁴⁹ Schwebel, *Apparition, Healings and Weeping Madonnas*, 4.

⁵⁵⁰ Schwebel, 5.

reason why many people are carried away by a little news of miracles, apparitions, and healings in different places.

As a result of this particular understanding of miraculous events which emphasises external phenomena more, some Pentecostal pastors have turned everything about Christianity into wealth and health ideology. Such an expression like ‘if you are a believer, you cannot suffer materially or physically’ is what one hears in such churches. They advertise alleged miraculous claims in the churches, television stations, and radio stations to authenticate their claims. Consequently, people have developed a bad attitude of moving from one church to another in search of miracles or mystical experiences thereby living on the fringe of their spiritual lives. Moreover, some people hinge their faith on miracles which when not available will make them seek for one to strengthen it. Fourth, theological reflection on miracles is necessitated because of people’s attitudes towards supernatural encounter and their understanding of it in this contemporary period. A situation where God is mainly sought in external phenomena is unacceptable. When God is seen only as a transcendental being and not immanent being as well, then, the understanding of God as someone intervening from outside is the apparent model of God’s relationship with the world. When people fail to situate the special Divine acts within general Divine acts properly, the tendency to see miraculous events as only acts of God is obvious.⁵⁵¹ This tendency is gradually becoming the new norm for the contemporary Christians who are always waiting for their miracles or for God to do something extraordinary in their lives. Sequel to that, the news about miracles and apparitions has reached a hyper level in this age.

4.1. Recognition of Miracles

In the opinion of René Latourelle, “the problem of recognition of miracles ought to be studied first at the level of *spontaneous* recognition, that is, the recognition elicited when individuals are suddenly confronted with a miracle.... Theologians can then dissect and analyze each phase in the dialectic that leads the mind from the observed phenomenon to a judgement that this wonder is a sign from God; in this process the theologian continually takes the original spontaneous recognition as a guide.”⁵⁵² Spontaneous and theological recognitions are two modes of knowledge. The former is intuitive while the latter is systematic. Theological recognition makes use of the data generated from spontaneous

⁵⁵¹ Schwebel, 6.

⁵⁵² Latourelle, *The Miracles of Jesus and the Theology of Miracles*, 300.

recognition in analysing miraculous events. There are some questions one needs to answer about recognition as was highlighted by T. G. Pater. “The crucial question about miracles is the question of their recognizability. Can there be CERTITUDE, first, about the external event itself, as a historical fact, aside from its natural or supernatural character? Can there be certitude, second, about the miraculous character of the event?”⁵⁵³ These questions centre on the two types of recognition, spontaneous and theological recognitions. To answer these questions let us turn to René Latourelle, who says that “spontaneous recognition is a matter of practical life. Theological recognition is a matter rather of methodical reflection by believers who analyze each phase of spontaneous discernment. They turn to historical criticism to establish the reality of the fact or event; they draw on the resources of science when they study the event as something utterly unparalleled, and on the resources of revelation and faith when they pass judgement on the religious context and reality of the signs.”⁵⁵⁴ The Church in her canonical trial of miracles during the process of beatification and canonization makes use of the data provided by theologians to verify the miracles attributed to would-be saints.⁵⁵⁵

Furthermore, miracles are tangible realities for the fact that they are perceptible to the senses of the recipients and somehow to those around. It is on the accounts of these people that other witnesses base their testimonies. The prodigious nature of the event makes it obvious to attract more attention. Hence, in recognition of miraculous events, one is dealing with two facts moral and historical certitudes. Here moral certitude means certitude based on the human witness of the miraculous events.

The criteria to be applied in recognition of miracles as a miraculous event depends on one’s definition of miracle. For some people, miraculous event need not be beyond the power of corporeal beings in a strict sense but may be extremely unlikely from the standpoint of their power alone. In this view, the primary emphasis on the recognition of miracles, according to T.G. Pater, “is to be placed on the religious context. Not any religious context whatsoever is sufficient. The context must be such that one can reasonably conclude that God in His providence would not cause or allow the extraordinary event in question unless He did intend it to be taken as a sign from Him.”⁵⁵⁶ Second, there are many ways an event can be beyond the power of corporeal beings: “The

⁵⁵³ Pater, “Miracles,” 667.

⁵⁵⁴ Latourelle, *The Miracles of Jesus and the Theology of Miracles*, 300.

⁵⁵⁵ Latourelle, 300.

⁵⁵⁶ Pater, “Miracle,” 667.

event might be intrinsically of a kind that could never happen naturally with any corporeal subject; e.g., its occupying strictly the same place as another body. Or the event might be of a kind that could happen in another corporeal subject but not in the one under consideration, e.g., speech in a dog. Or it might be the kind of thing that could happen even in this subject but not under these particular circumstances or in this particular way, e.g., fluent speech in a newborn child or the instantaneous cure of an advanced organic disease.”⁵⁵⁷

The discernment of miracles as something beyond the power of nature involves a comparison between what happens in miracles and natural events under normal conditions. Depending on the result, one can conclude that the events are miraculous when under normal circumstances the outcome differs significantly that the only reasonable explanation is that it is from God. “The disproportion between the natural effect and the miraculous effect may appear in various ways. The difference may be in quantity, or in quality, or in both. One particular difference, seen in many miracles, is in the time required. The miracle often takes place instantaneously, or at least in a much shorter time than is required to produce a similar result naturally. There are, furthermore, in most miracles, positive indications that the principal force responsible for the extraordinary event is a force operating intelligently and freely and, therefore, not a merely natural force.”⁵⁵⁸

Nevertheless, not all things that are beyond the power of corporeal beings are from God because there are non-corporeal beings. These non-corporeal beings have power which is greater than the power of corporeal being. How to identify that so and so actions are from such non-corporeal being is somehow a problem because some of them are good while others are bad. In the opinion of T.G. Pater, “a sufficient criterion is provided by the moral circumstances— e.g., the dignity or incongruity of the event itself, the character and conduct of the human “miracle worker,” and, most important, the good or evil effects of the event. Though there can be exceptions to the principle, morally good circumstances point to a divine origin, evil circumstances to a diabolic origin.”⁵⁵⁹

The issue of the recognition of miracles is not an easy task, and yet must be done with right intentions. Miracles are not a scientific matter, and any attempt to subject them to a

⁵⁵⁷ Pater, 668.

⁵⁵⁸ Pater, 668.

⁵⁵⁹ Pater, 669.

condition where they do not belong would yield a negative result. According to René Latourelle, “miracles are not laboratory samples that can be subjected to analytical testing with a view to scientific judgement on them. The miracles of Jesus are addressed to the mass of those who, educated or not, have eyes to see, common sense, and good hearts. For, when all is said and done, the judgement on miracles as sign of God is religious matter; the judgement is passed at the level of interiority at which human beings have either already decided that they are self-sufficient or, on the contrary, have become aware of their wretchedness and have admitted that they are poor, weak, helpless, and ‘in need of salvation.’”⁵⁶⁰ The domain of miracles remains that of religion and not science. Even though science and scientific knowledge would help in clarifying and verifying the authenticity of miracles, they do not have the last say in this matter.

In the opinion of René Latourelle, some eye-catching miracles that are demanded of God which conflict with the faith or any attempt to attain to glory without passing through the cross is a negative trait of miracles. Accordingly, “to be rejected are miracles conceived as the kind of exaltation of the wonder-worker that is typical of the heroes of the pagan world; to be rejected is every triumphal manifestation that avoids the cross.”⁵⁶¹ In the temptation of Jesus, he rejected such a vainglory rather chose to do God’s will. According to Louis Monden, the “essential characteristic of the Christian miracle is that it must not be marked by excessive sensationalism, but should rather display a real discretion. It is generally thought—and even devout Christians fall victims to this error—that the divine intervention is most clear and most convincing when it departs in sensational fashion from the normal order. This easily leads to the attitude of mind which looks at the most abnormal as being the most *convincing* miracle.”⁵⁶² An excessive sensational miracle would not lead people to the purpose of the sign which is religious and so ends up entertaining people. Furthermore, people’s penchant for miracles these days is as a result of faith without a cross preached by many televangelist pastors and others. This is what the Jews of old desired when they clamoured for a sign from Heaven. A true miracle acts as an aid to faith and not otherwise. God would not use miracles to compel people to believe in him rather he urges them to accept his love made manifest in miracles.⁵⁶³ Second, Jesus rejected the easy way to victory based on miraculous actions, especially

⁵⁶⁰ Latourelle, *The Miracles of Jesus and the Theology of Miracles*, 299.

⁵⁶¹ Latourelle, 257.

⁵⁶² Louis Monden, *Signs and Wonders* (New York: Desclee, 1966), 60.

⁵⁶³ Monden, 62.

when asked to use a sign to prove his claim by the Pharisees and Herod. Miracles are not a necessity for faith rather an aid to it. “God, in the miracle, bends to our weakness and he strengthens our faith. The miraculous is, consequently, not a necessary path to faith. Man has no real claim to it. Anyone who would make of a miracle a prerequisite of his own going to God would thereby abandon Christianity; for he would set at naught the gratuitous or essentially free nature of the miracle: it is something that God grants when and as he wills.”⁵⁶⁴ Third, Jesus refused to work miracles when he encountered hearts that were hardened (cf Mark 6:1-6, Matt. 13:55-58).⁵⁶⁵ Fourth, faith is necessary for a miracle to take place. That is trust in the ability of Jesus to help the people in their appalling condition.⁵⁶⁶ These characteristics mentioned above do not reflect the signs of genuine supernatural intervention in the world. They may be another thing other than miraculous events

Under the positive characteristics we have to consider; first, the agent of the miraculous actions; second, the circumstances surrounding it; and third, the very nature of the extraordinary event itself. According to Louis Monden, “there are two cases which fulfil such requirement: one is that of personal sanctity; the other of apostolic mission. The miracle which is linked to human instrumentality shows itself usually by the work of a saint or an apostle, for it is in such alone that there exists an aptitude and a fitting ground in which the salvific character of the wonder can best and most fully be discerned.”⁵⁶⁷ There is need to explain the relationship between the messenger and the message that a miracle confirm. They are not intimately linked most often as the case may be. “The personal qualities of the wonder-worker seem less closely knit to the miraculous event when that event occurs to testify to a *divine mission*, to a message or to a doctrinal pronouncement. In such a case, the miracle may be likened to the credentials shown by an ambassador. It is the mission and the message which are certified to and not the personal worth or the talents of the ambassador himself. Such miraculous events testify rather to the divine desire to transmit the message than to the qualities of the chosen instrument.”⁵⁶⁸ That means God can use any person to achieve his purpose in the world. This kind of scenario is exceptional but does happen, especially when a person is saddled

⁵⁶⁴ Monden, 63-4.

⁵⁶⁵ Latourelle, *The Miracles of Jesus and the Theology of Miracles*, 258.

⁵⁶⁶ Latourelle, 258.

⁵⁶⁷ Monden, *Signs and Wonders*, 69.

⁵⁶⁸ Monden, 70-71.

with authority because of the office one occupies.⁵⁶⁹ However, the personal integrity of the messenger has much to do with the message one is proclaiming. In fact, one's integrity adds to the authenticity of the message one has received. On a more serious note, one's belief cannot be separated from their lives; they are part of them which they cannot deny.

There are some characteristics in the synoptic Gospels that help in identifying genuine miracles, especially in our days. These characteristics demarcate the genuine miracles from the inauthentic ones especially these days. On the positive characteristics of miracles of Jesus Christ one can deduce the followings: first, "a miracle has for its purpose the *salvation of the whole person*: heart and body alike. When Jesus pardons human beings or delivers them from other wretched states, he makes them aware of their impotence in the face of sin, sickness and death. They are lost if no Savior appears. Jesus comes precisely to restore them and give them the salvation for which they strive in vain."⁵⁷⁰ Second, "miracles are performed in view of a *call to the kingdom*. This aspect is remarkably illustrated by the healing of the possessed man among the Gerasenes (Mk 5:1-20)."⁵⁷¹ Jesus healed him and by so doing reintegrated him into the society fully. He was henceforth made a witness and a herald of the kingdom of God among his kith and kin. His presence in the community has a lot to say about Jesus and his tender mercy and empathy on the condition of humanity.

Third, "a miracle establishes a *new, personal, transforming relationship* between Jesus and its beneficiary. The latter is not asked scrupulously to practice magical rites but simply to enter by faith into an all-embracing relationship with Jesus. This is why when Jesus heals he always calls for faith....This link between miracle and conversion, this establishment of an entirely new and personal relationship between Jesus and the beneficiaries of his miracles, is a specific characteristic of Christian miracles."⁵⁷² In some Pentecostal churches what people do after receiving healing would cast doubt on the authenticity of the power involved. It is almost magical if not magic.

Fourth, miracles come with some cross on the healed and healer because the events are always contrary to human expectation. Hence, they are persecuted and called names because of the miraculous actions received. According to René Latourelle, "the miracles

⁵⁶⁹ Monden, 71.

⁵⁷⁰ Latourelle, *The Miracles of Jesus and the Theology of Miracles*, 258.

⁵⁷¹ Latourelle, 258.

⁵⁷² Latourelle, 259.

of Jesus are performed *under the sign of the cross*. Jesus personifies the reign of God that destroys the reign of Satan. The shadow of the cross is thus at every point inseparable from the miracles. The exorcisms of Jesus are interpreted by others as the work of Beelzebul. The healings he works for the lake towns lead not to conversion but to the hardening of hearts. The miracles of accreditation, performed on the Sabbath, arouse hatred and beget the decision to destroy Jesus.”⁵⁷³ Miracles especially that of Jesus manifest his personality to people who seek him deeply.

4.1.1. Spontaneous Recognition

In the spontaneous recognition, the dialogue is between the healed, those around and the new visible reality before them. What can they make of the new reality before them? How would they explain that to those who may ask of them? In the opinion of René Latourelle, “as soon as the wonder has been performed its inherent logic begins to operate. It challenges the witnesses, and these (sic) respond in accordance with the dispositions of their hearts: each witness passes the judgement on himself or herself that will bring loss or salvation.”⁵⁷⁴ Immediately, a miraculous event takes place the next thing is the processing of the data by the brain which determines someone’s response to the observed phenomena. Certainly, some people will agree immediately with the miraculous nature of the event while some will reject it. The next group in this scenario is those who are indecisive. It depends on the person’s ability to process information from the observed phenomena. “Those who do not reject this obvious truth, but allow the facts to speak, are close to the conclusion that the hand of God is at work in the wonder. Those who do reject it have reached the point at which, blinded by this utterly pure light, they seal their own condemnation by declaring good to be evil.”⁵⁷⁵ Miracles can lead someone to accept Jesus or to reject him depending on the disposition of the person. According to René Latourelle, “every miracle of Jesus is a call to conversion and to faith in his mission, so that the believer may attain to the kingdom. Every miracle leads in fact either to acceptance of Jesus and the kingdom or rejection of Jesus and the kingdom offered. It is in this that, according to St. John, the entire human drama consists: human beings are either open to God or they are closed to him and blind to the light. Every miracle becomes a judgement.

⁵⁷³ Latourelle, 260.

⁵⁷⁴ Latourelle, 301.

⁵⁷⁵ Latourelle, 303.

‘this is the judgment, that the light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil’ (Jn 3:19).”⁵⁷⁶

René Latourelle in comparing the healing of the man born blind in the Bible and the Marie Ferrand in Lourdes says that the mind is always agitated because of the phenomenon it encounters. “In both cases there is shock and agitation at the wonder that suddenly irrupts into the life of those present; human explanations that are immediately routed; recourse to hypotheses that try to make the event fit into the normal course of things; the presence and increasingly compelling force of the hypothesis that makes the event and its context coherently meaningful. Finally, the human being involved surrenders, acknowledging that he is a sinner and in need of salvation. The miracle is seen as an action of God intervening in our life: it challenges and invites to conversion.”⁵⁷⁷

Ralph M. McInerny hinted that faith is not all that necessary for one to recognise miracles because one concludes from what he or she has observed. “So far, the miracle does not exceed the realm of ordinary human observations. It is when the implications of this observations make themselves felt that witnesses react differently. What am I to make of this person who raised a dead man to life? As the conclusion that he is himself divine or that he is working with divine power begins to unfold, some witnesses might begin to question the evidence of their senses.”⁵⁷⁸ The pondering will lead some people to say no, this is not a miracle, while others will accept it as a miracle. Their action at the first stage is spontaneous and cannot be rejected as such. René Latourelle pointed out the difference between the spontaneous and theological recognitions as follow, “in spontaneous recognition the process is one of intuitions and synthetic apprehensions; theological reflection, however, which operates at the scientific level, can make the process explicit and describe its dialectical movement.”⁵⁷⁹

4.1.2. Theological Recognition

According to René Latourelle, theological recognition “as distinct from spontaneous recognition the approach is obviously more critical and demanding, especially in what regards the components of the miracle, the exceptional character of the event, the qualifications of the witnesses, and the context. But, in both spontaneous and theological

⁵⁷⁶ Latourelle, 304.

⁵⁷⁷ Latourelle, 308.

⁵⁷⁸ McInerny, *Miracles a Catholic View*, 144-5.

⁵⁷⁹ Latourelle, *The Miracles of Jesus and the Theology of Miracles*, 310.

recognition the focus of attention from the outset is on the *totality of the signifying wonder*.”⁵⁸⁰ Moreover, theological reflection has no other aim but recognition of miracles and makes use of data derived from the spontaneous recognition. In fact, it is the systematised look at the data from people who have encountered or observed miraculous healing in their lives. Theological recognition scrutinises the historical authenticity and supernaturality of the event in question objectively.⁵⁸¹ The Congregation for the Causes of Saints makes use of this method in their procedure for beatification and canonization of a would-be saint. The norms are the painstaking work of theologians especially Prospero Lambertini, who later became Pope Benedict XIV. Miracles do not end with the wonder as highlighted earlier; they go beyond that level to a level of signifying something to believers. “At the phenomenal level, it is an observable, disconcerting event; it therefore surprises and even stuns. But in its fuller reality it presents itself as a signifying totality. If, then, a miracle is a *sign*, a kind of theophany intended for religious human beings in need of salvation, it follows that the effort at religious human beings in need of salvation, it follows that the effort at recognition of a miracle should focus on the understanding of it as a *signifying totality*.”⁵⁸²

Any true recognition of miracles must consider the factual and signified aspects of them for proper understanding. “The problem of the recognition of miracles needs to be posed and resolved, so it seems to me, in a synthetic perspective, that is, one that does not isolate the *factual* from the *signified* reality that is conveyed by the context in which the fact occurs....In a true miracles there is an unbroken correspondence of signifier and signified; the factual and the intentional illumine one another, leading to a sure judgement on the authenticity of the divine sign.”⁵⁸³ It would be wrong to consider only the meaning of the second stage of miracles which is the religious significance. It behoves on any person venturing into such to consider the reality as a whole. Hence, “if a miracle is from the outset a wonder-that-signifies, then its structure as a sign should inspire and guide any of the process of recognition. This is doubtless a matter of approach, but it is nonetheless of decisive importance. When the mind adopts the perspective of miracle-as-sign, it

⁵⁸⁰ Latourelle, 301.

⁵⁸¹ Latourelle, 308.

⁵⁸² Latourelle, 308.

⁵⁸³ Latourelle, 309.

proceeds through a series of steps, the starting point of which is a totality (a *Gestalt*, or integrated configuration) which already shows itself to be a sign.”⁵⁸⁴

In the process of recognition of miracles, all the components of them must be considered. The historicity of the miraculous event and the religious context constitute organic whole which theologians have to reflect on. They analyse the components of miracles to ascertain their coherence and credibility.⁵⁸⁵ In the process of recognition, theology can employ the help of other disciplines where necessary to clarify some contentious issues beyond its jurisdiction. René Latourelle, argues that “in one of its aspects, namely, as an observable, extraordinary event, a miracle is subject to scientific verification. In this area theology can and must call upon competent specialists. It must not be afraid to push the claims of science, even to the point of causing irritation; at the same time, however, it continues to be aware that the final word on the true character of the reality in question belongs not to science but to religious and ecclesial authority.”⁵⁸⁶ The historical reality of the miraculous events must be ascertained before any other thing. In the case of Jesus’ miracles, many criteria have been adduced to prove the historical nature of the events. On the other hand, it is necessary in the investigation of the private Revelations to ascertain the fact of such wonders. In the words of René Latourelle, “insofar as it is something visible, a miracle can be observed and described, like any other fact or event. This is even more than ordinarily true in this case because a miracle, being something unusual, is immediately the object of special attention. The goal of historical criticism is limited but necessary, because before one expatiates on the meaning of the event, it is extremely important to know whether or not the event really took place and, if it did, in what circumstances.”⁵⁸⁷ Those in charge of beatification and canonization of the would-be saints use this method in the trail of the proposed miracles. For the verification done by the Congregation for the Causes of Saints, the Church accepts only facts which have no equivalent in the secular world. Accordingly, “theological reflection, like the critical verification practiced by the Church, does not allow us to reach an equal degree of certainty in every case. As a matter of fact, when dealing with isolated cases, the Church accepts only facts for which there is no solidly attested equivalent in a *secular* or profane context.”⁵⁸⁸ On the other hand, the context under which the alleged miracle took place

⁵⁸⁴ Latourelle, 309.

⁵⁸⁵ Latourelle, 310.

⁵⁸⁶ Latourelle, 310.

⁵⁸⁷ Latourelle, 311.

⁵⁸⁸ Latourelle, 309.

matters much. The Church does not consider anything outside religious context as miraculous. As a matter of fact, the Church does not consider any alleged miracle that does not have religious background as its context.⁵⁸⁹ However, this position is not tenable with the miracles ascribed to Jesus Christ which he performed in the context of Messianic expectation, and they point to his Divine mission and authority.

Another characteristic of miracles that distinguishes them from the competence of the science is their exceptional character. No doubt science has been contributing immensely in the verification of miraculous events presently, but it lacks the power to declare any action miraculous.⁵⁹⁰ Miracles are not observable experience, in the sense that one can explain all that went through during the process. They are unlike laboratory experience in which one takes note of all that happens during the process of transition from one stage to the other. They are not repeatable pure and simple. In the words of René Latourelle, “Divine intervention does not involve a ‘filmable’ process in the organism of the healed person. A physician can observe the person’s condition before and after the cure, but the act of healing is not observable. No one has ever seen a miracle repeated after the manner of a laboratory experiment. There is first a wound and then a scar, but no ‘in between.’ There is no explanation at the scientific level. A miracle takes the rational scientific approach by surprise.”⁵⁹¹

The element of instantaneity is a character of miraculous events for the people. On the side of God, this character may not mean anything because he is not subject to the time and space. For God, there is nothing like space and time but simply infinite acts. There is no past and future but an eternal present. Now coming to the issue of miracles and God’s manner of acting, these actions follow from his nature. “A miracle is a simple action on God’s part: he produces it without traversing space or time, even though the result of his action is a state of things in space and time. A miracle does not overturn the processes of nature; it *transcends* them. The divine action is not mediated by a continuum of observable, filmable phenomena. The instantaneousness of miracles, which leaves scientists stunned and speechless, is the sign of an intervention of divine power.”⁵⁹² Miracles are Divine acts. People should not simply judge the miraculous realities as if they are judging empirical data in the laboratory. Rather, on the side of God miraculous

⁵⁸⁹ Latourelle, 310.

⁵⁹⁰ Latourelle, 311.

⁵⁹¹ Latourelle, 312.

⁵⁹² Latourelle, 312.

events are normal since he has the power to create things out of nothing and sustain them in accordance with his will.⁵⁹³

For the fact that an event (healing) is inexplicable or unexplainable by a scientist or physician does not qualify such an event to be called a miracle. Miracle is only possible within a religious setting. It is under this condition that a person will be seeking the purpose and the meaning of the inexplicable and unexplainable signs. René Latourelle submits that “this religious meaning of what is scientifically inexplicable is, of course, acceptable only if the religious setting of the phenomena can be seen to be a seamless web. The church attaches great importance to the study of this context.”⁵⁹⁴ In the canonical trial of miraculous events, the Church rejects any miracle that manifests any elements of frivolity, extravagance or questionable morality, smacking of trickery, emotional excitement, charlatanry, fakery, oddity, greediness, or self-interest, occult, spiritualism, hypnosis and magic.⁵⁹⁵ The recognition of miracles is not as easy as people may think. One has to be in right frame of mind; opening oneself to the mystery of God who has revealed himself in Christ to us in order to recognise a miracle. Hence, “the recognition of a miracle is not a matter simply of mental acuity or technique but of a religious and moral attitude. To recognize a miracle is to open oneself to the mystery of God who calls us in Jesus Christ; it is to acknowledge that human beings are needy and not self-sufficient.”⁵⁹⁶

Furthermore, René Latourelle lists four attitudes people manifest in response to miracles. These attitudes are evident in the people’s quest for extraordinary reality in the contemporary period. In the Gospels, different likely attitudes of people in response to the miracles are evident. Some look solely for wonders (John 2:23-25; 3:2-3), and are not interested in the significance of the signs. Others witness the mighty works of Jesus but reject the meaning they portend. For such people, Jesus received his power from Satan; the enemy of God (Mark 3:22; John 8:48). On the other hand, some people accept these wonders as special Divine actions without any commitment whatsoever (Luke 17:14-15). Moreover, the final group accept and acknowledge the meaning of miraculous events from Jesus and their significance for humanity. This is the case with the man born blind

⁵⁹³ Latourelle, 313.

⁵⁹⁴ Latourelle, 313.

⁵⁹⁵ Latourelle, 313.

⁵⁹⁶ Latourelle, 316.

healed by Jesus in John 9.⁵⁹⁷ In other words, miracles are a sign given to humanity by God to lead them towards conversion and finally to his kingdom. Nevertheless, the capacity to interpret these signs are beyond them, but with the help of God's grace, they can understand the meaning of these signs.

Still more, the idea that Satan as a non-corporeal being can perform some wonders which appear to people as unique Divine actions calls for clarification. On the other hand, it is pertinent to differentiate between an authentic Divine sign and feigned Divine sign. René Latourelle, argues that “the most important thing to be kept in mind here is the religious context, both *mediate* and *immediate*, in which authentic miracles, on the one hand, and miracles feigned by Satan, on the other, are located. Authentic miracles are signs of salvation and the coming of the kingdom, and invitations to *conversion* in order that human beings may enter the kingdom. Demonic wonders, on the contrary, always aim at destruction, because Satan cannot work against himself. Demonic works always display in a more or less veiled way a determination to strike a Christ and to destroy his reign.”⁵⁹⁸ Devil's intention is always veiled and tinted with seemingly kind gestures to deceive people. It is good to monitor the direction of the purported miracles, to know if they lead people to God or not. Hence, that calls for the discernment of the Spirit that is operative in each religious actions. In the opinion of René Latourelle, “recognition of authentic as opposed to feigned signs requires, therefore, a *discernment of spirits*. This work of discernment or recognition consists in carefully examining the factual and religious clues and, in the case of a demonic sign, removing the ambiguity and bringing to light the demonic trickery that is operative.”⁵⁹⁹ These are true reflections of what people should do in the miraculous events to avoid being deceived by some people intentionally or unintentionally. These signs will inevitably lead people to authentic miracles and to avoid false miracles, humility, moderation, patience, agreement with Scripture and doctrines, and charity or divine love.⁶⁰⁰ The Magisterium as the custodian of the words and tradition is there to direct people towards recognising God's inspired miracles.

4.1.3. Magisterium and Recognition of Miracles

According to Mary Valentine, “it is not enough that an individual member who has received supernatural help should be aware of it; the community, too, ought to be certain

⁵⁹⁷ Latourelle, 316.

⁵⁹⁸ Latourelle, 324.

⁵⁹⁹ Latourelle, 324-25.

⁶⁰⁰ Thavis, *The Vatican Prophecy*, 243-4.

of it, seeing that the miracle as a sign is not directed only to an individual but also, in a preeminent way to the community. As such it must be confirmed by the authority which guides the community, and enjoys the assistance of the Holy Spirit, who protects it from errors.”⁶⁰¹ The Church document *Lumen Gentium* spelt out in clear terms what should be the attitude of the authorities on the charisms and gifts in the Church. It is not necessary to crush or discourage those endowed with these gifts. The conciliar fathers said, “it is not only through the sacraments and the ministries of the Church that the Holy Spirit sanctifies and leads the people of God and enriches it with virtues, but, allotting his gifts to everyone according as He wills, He distributes special graces among the faithful of every rank. By these gifts He makes them fit and ready to undertake the various tasks and offices which contribute toward the renewal and building up of the Church.”⁶⁰² The Church authorities must see that sanity is maintained about the use of the extraordinary gifts. On the other hand, the “judgment as to their genuinity and proper use belongs to those who are appointed leaders in the Church, to whose special competence it belongs, not indeed to extinguish the Spirit, but to test all things and hold fast to that which is good.”⁶⁰³ The reason for the guidance of the Church is stressed vividly by Michael O’Neill when he said that “without full knowledge of all the facts surrounding alleged phenomena, it is important for the faithful to rely on the judgement of the competent ecclesial authority—the local bishop—in providing pastoral guidance on these matters.”⁶⁰⁴ Bishops have the power to do that in line with extant laws of the Church, and the faithful have equally a serious role to play by obeying the bishops’ directives. According to Can. 212 §1. “Conscious of their own responsibility, the Christian faithful are bound to follow with Christian obedience those things which the sacred pastors, inasmuch as they represent Christ, declare as teachers of the faith or establish as rulers of the Church.”⁶⁰⁵

Nevertheless, bishops have acknowledged the difficulties they are facing in discerning the miraculous events in the contemporary periods. Their reservations appeared in the introduction to the “Norms Regarding the Manner of Proceeding in the Discernment of Presumed Apparitions or Revelations”: “Modern mentality and the requirements of

⁶⁰¹ Valentine, *Miracles*, 102.

⁶⁰² LG, 12.

⁶⁰³ LG, 12.

⁶⁰⁴ O’Neill, *Exploring the Miraculous*, 32-3.

⁶⁰⁵ Catholic Church, *Code of Canon Law*, rev. 1983, cann. 212 §1, http://www.vatican.va/archive/ENG1104/_PU.HTM.

critical scientific investigation render it more difficult, if not almost impossible, to achieve with the required speed the judgments that in the past concluded the investigation of such matters (*constat de supernaturalitate, non constat de supernaturalitate*) and that offered to the Ordinaries the possibility of authorizing or prohibiting public cult or other forms of devotion among the faithful.”⁶⁰⁶ As a result of these reasons, they formulated some criteria for the discernment of the miracles in conjunction with the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith. These criteria are not in any way at all presuming certainty about what they intend to achieve. They vividly stressed the probable nature of these criteria in judging the authenticity of alleged apparitions and Revelations. Discerning apparition is a serious task as John Thavis reiterated: “Distinguishing between a divine apparition and a diabolical trick has always required careful discernment, focusing on the integrity of the seer, the content of messages, and the effect of apparitions on the wider community.”⁶⁰⁷ Satan can and does appear in the form of an angel of light to deceive people. Notwithstanding the criteria developed by the Church to discern the miraculous events, it remains a herculean task for the Church’s authority. “Even “authentic” seers can represent a challenge to authority, especially when their visions and messages hint at a cache of knowledge allegedly hidden from the faithful, which the hierarchy would rather keep to itself.”⁶⁰⁸

According to Fredrick Mbiere, there are many cases of abuse that warranted the norms about healing prayers or healing ministry. According to him, “it is purported that some priests-healers also go to the extent of forcing people into some oath-taking that are dehumanizing and as such violate the freedom of conscience of the distressed clients. Added to this are some harsh conditions at times, being prescribed to the sick in order to experience his divine healing, these include: some devastating dry fasting, many sleepless nights of all-night prayers, a complete avoidance of any medical treatment, the scandalous way of the anointing of some parts of the body by the minister often embarrassing.”⁶⁰⁹ More still, this did not end with these unholy practices; there is still the issue of financial interest that seems to override every other motive in the healing ministry especially in Nigeria and the like. It is no more news to hear about consulting or counselling fee, fees for this kind of prayer or the other. In almost all the healing centres different types of

⁶⁰⁶ Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, “Norms Regarding the Manner of Proceeding in the Discernment of Presumed Apparitions or Revelations.”

⁶⁰⁷ Thavis, *The Vatican Prophecies*, 94.

⁶⁰⁸ Thavis, 242-243.

⁶⁰⁹ Mbiere, *Healing Ministry in Nigeria*, 140.

merchandises that belong to the healer are on sale. They include anointing or healing oils of different types, candles of various sizes, salt, cosmetics, other religious articles and publications.⁶¹⁰

Suffice it to say that genuine private Revelations do not mean that there are no human errors in them. There may be some human influences that are pardonable sometimes. “Discernment is also complicated by the unavoidable influence of the seer’s personality on the imaginative content of the vision. Even genuine revelations contain both human and divine influences. The tradition holds that a vision can be genuine and still have hallucinatory elements. At the same time, affirming the authenticity of a vision does not mean the vision is correct in every aspect and must be accepted as such.”⁶¹¹ On the other hand, the criteria are not official edicts to suppress private Revelations, but measures with which to maintain sanity in the Church and society. The Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith stressed this idea when it said, “it is to be noted that these criteria, be they positive or negative, are not peremptory but rather indicative, and they should be applied cumulatively or with some mutual convergence.”⁶¹² The norms listed the competent authorities whose duty it is to investigate as follows:

1. The local ordinary: Once there is news of apparition or Revelation, the local bishop begins with the assessment of the situation looking diligently for the elements of authenticity or fraud. Once he finds an element of authenticity in the phenomenon, he sets up a committee of experts from different fields to help him in the process of investigation. He has the duty to promote devotion arising from a private Revelation in line with the norms guiding such.
2. The regional or national Conference of Bishops can intervene: on the visitation and approval of the local bishop or when it concerns the region or the nation as a whole.
3. The Apostolic See: They can intervene on three conditions, when requested by the local bishop, at the request of a qualified group of the faithful, and directly because of the universal jurisdiction of the Supreme Pontiff. He does this with *motu proprio* in extreme cases.⁶¹³ The Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith acts an overseer as regards the

⁶¹⁰ Mbiere, 140-1.

⁶¹¹ Schwebel, *Apparitions, Healings, and Weeping Madonnas*, 127.

⁶¹² Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, “Norms Regarding the Manner of Proceeding in the Discernment of Presumed Apparitions or Revelations.”

⁶¹³ Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith.

local bishop's procedures in applying the criteria. Hence, "it is up to the Sacred Congregation to judge and approve the Ordinary's way of proceeding or, in so far as it be possible and fitting, to initiate a new examination of the matter, distinct from that undertaken by the Ordinary and carried out either by the Sacred Congregation itself or by a special Commission."⁶¹⁴

The Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith proposes two kinds of criteria, negative and positive, both of which must be satisfied in judging private Revelations or apparitions. The local bishop has to apply these criteria as stated in the norms in evaluating the evidence of private Revelation, positive criteria:

- a) "Moral certitude, or at least great probability of the existence of the fact, acquired by means of a serious investigation;
- b) Particular circumstances relative to the existence and to the nature of the fact, that is to say: 1. Personal qualities of the subject or of the subjects (in particular, psychological equilibrium, honesty and rectitude of moral life, sincerity and habitual docility towards Ecclesiastical Authority, the capacity to return to a normal regimen of a life of faith, etc.); 2. As regards revelation: true theological and spiritual doctrine and immune from error; 3. Healthy devotion and abundant and constant spiritual fruit (for example, spirit of prayer, conversion, testimonies of charity, etc.)."⁶¹⁵

Fredrick Jelly in his analysis of first positive criteria says, "the members of the investigative commission accomplish this by seeking out eye witnesses, especially the visionaries themselves; by visiting the place of the alleged apparitions; by conducting interviews with any or all who can provide the necessary information to assure that the actual facts have been established."⁶¹⁶

On the other hand, the Congregation listed the negative criteria as follows:

- a) "Manifest error concerning the fact.
- b) Doctrinal errors attributed to God himself, or to the Blessed Virgin Mary, or to some saint in their manifestations, taking into account however the possibility that the subject

⁶¹⁴ Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith.

⁶¹⁵ Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith.

⁶¹⁶ Jelly, "Discerning the Miraculous," 46.

might have added, even unconsciously, purely human elements or some error of the natural order to an authentic supernatural revelation.

c) Evidence of a search for profit or gain strictly connected to the fact.

d) Gravely immoral acts committed by the subject or his or her followers when the fact occurred or in connection with it.

e) Psychological disorder or psychopathic tendencies in the subject, that with certainty influenced on the presumed supernatural fact, or psychosis, collective hysteria or other things of this kind.”⁶¹⁷ All these positive and negative criteria are not exhaustive in themselves but they are applied cummulatively in the process of discerning private Revelations.⁶¹⁸

From all indications, the Church is making a serious effort in all fronts to ensure the continuity of the healing ministry of Christ in a proper manner.⁶¹⁹ Moreover, the cases of abuse in Nigerian Church are a source of concern to the hierarchies of the Church in recent times. “The practices of a good number of healing ministers both the priest-healers and the lay-healers have never left the Church in Nigeria, and the Nigerian Catholic Bishops in particular at ease, and as such, have kept the CBCN highly uncomfortable right from the dawn of the present trend of the healing ministry proliferation.”⁶²⁰ From Nigerian perspective, it seems that financial motives and quest for undue public attention are the motivating factors behind what is happening in the healing ministries in the contemporary period. It is in the exercise of their grave responsibility that the Catholic Bishop’s Conference of Nigeria (CBCN) led down some guidelines for healing ministry. One of the most important guidelines is the rejection of monetisation of healing in any form at all. They banned any form of money yielding ventures and any fees payable for ministries.⁶²¹

Obedience to the competent authority is crucial in the discernment and recognition of miraculous events in the life of the Church as stated in positive criteria. It is a serious quality of authentic and genuine private Revelations from God. Obedience has played a

⁶¹⁷ Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, “Norms Regarding the Manner of Proceeding in the Discernment of Presumed Apparitions or Revelations.”

⁶¹⁸ Jelly, “Discerning the Miraculous,” 47.

⁶¹⁹ Mbiere, *Healing Ministry in Nigeria*, 46.

⁶²⁰ Mbiere, 133.

⁶²¹ The Catholic Bishops’ Conference of Nigerian, *Guidelines for the Healing Ministry in the Catholic Church in Nigeria*, 24.

great role in the lives of many saints who were endowed with charismatic gifts. In the recent past “obedience played an important role in perhaps the most famous instance of the Church’s changing its stance on the assessment of private revelation—the universally approved and widely celebrated Divine Mercy devotion, originating in visions of Christ and the Virgin Mary as received by Polish nun St. Faustina Kowalska (1905-1938). Initially prohibitions were placed on the messages of the apparitions by the local bishop and Congregation for the Doctrine of the faith. This condemnation was finally lifted in 1978 through work of St. John Paul II.”⁶²² Another instance of obedience is the case of St. Pio: “Because of the need to investigate his tremendous mystical gifts, reportedly including the stigmata, bilocation, and the ability to read souls, and because of the public curiosity surrounding those gifts, Church authorities suppressed his ability to say Mass publicly. St. Pio was obedient until his death in 1968 and was canonized in 2002.”⁶²³ He obeyed the instruction not to celebrate a public mass and complied with the directives of the Church till his death.

Now with regard to the judgements of apparitions, one of the three traditional pronouncements will likely be the case depending on the result of the investigation, not ‘worthy of belief,’ ‘approved,’ and ‘nothing contrary to the faith.’ According to Michael O’Neill, “the negative judgement category that asserts that the events is not worthy of belief is given by Latin formulation *constat de non supernaturalitate*, that is, ‘it is established that there is nothing supernatural.’ Furthermore, ‘the positive judgement, which confirms that the event is worthy of belief, is given by Latin formulation *constat de supernaturalitate*, that is, ‘it is established that there is something supernatural.’”⁶²⁴ The judgement is not based on one criterion alone but in all the positive criteria put together. Hence, evidence of true apparition does not make the apparition to be genuine. Equally, a public cult is officially established for veneration when the apparition is approved. The veneration is not obligatory in any way at all on the people.

Moreover, there is another judgement which is “the one of uncertainty, calling for a ‘wait and see’ stance. This judgement is given in the form of Latin phrase *non constat de supernaturalitate*, that is, ‘it is *not* established that there is something supernatural.’ The vast majority of investigated apparitions receive this assessment when the investigative

⁶²² O’Neill, *Exploring the Miraculous*, 35.

⁶²³ O’Neill, 36.

⁶²⁴ O’Neill, 52-53.

committee cannot at that time make a definitive conclusion. An apparition with such a designation might or might not be of supernatural origin.”⁶²⁵ In this kind of scenario, the local bishop will determine how to cater for the pastoral needs of the people coming around the alleged apparition centre, since there is no clear judgement to non-supernaturality of the event. Sometimes the investigation continues after this initial judgement, and the faithful are encouraged to follow the directives of their bishop, who continues to monitor the development. He limits rather than encourages the public activities there because of the on-going investigation.

It should be noted that the decision of the local bishop is not final, his successors may review and upgrade it or downgrade it. “The controversial 1945 Amsterdam apparitions received by Ida Peerdeman experienced a reversal by Bishop Jozef Marianus Punt of Haarlem of a previous ‘established as not supernatural’ judgement that had been acknowledged in 1974 and later republished in 2006 by the CDF.”⁶²⁶ Another miraculous event in which its previous decision saw reversion “was the controversial locution and bleeding statue of Our Lady of Akita, Japan, from 1973 to 1981, which originally *non constat* judgement from a first commission of inquiry initiated by Bishop John Shojiro of Niigata, when Bishop Ito consulted with Cardinal Ratzinger, the head of the CDF, Ito expressed such a strong belief in the authenticity of the events the he was encouraged by Ratzinger to form a second commission, after which Ito declared on April 22, 1984.”⁶²⁷ Nevertheless, this particular action remains controversial because of the message of the apparition. The debate is whether the approval is for the bleeding statue only or for the bleeding statue and the message of the apparition which remains unacceptable to the hierarchies of the Church.

Fredrick Jelly while commenting on the “Norms Regarding the Manner of Proceeding in the Discernment of Presumed Apparitions or Revelations of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith,” says that “the object of the discerning process, as it proposes to come to a judgment about the authenticity of apparitions and private revelations, is to examine precisely the evidence for signs of the miraculous. The CDF norms are concerned with the spiritual fruits as one of the signs, but these can be present without miracles. So, the signs of sanctifying graces at work are not sufficient of themselves to

⁶²⁵ O’Neill, 54.

⁶²⁶ O’Neill, 56.

⁶²⁷ O’Neill, 56.

show that the apparitions are of heavenly origin.”⁶²⁸ Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger when asked how the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith discern the private Revelations said, it “is to separate the aspect of the true or presumed ‘supernaturality’ of the apparition from that of its spiritual fruits.”⁶²⁹ Be that as it may, miracles in private Revelations are signs of credibility. Hence, “just as the miraculous has provided motives of credibility or invitations to a deeper or firmer faith in public revelation, so the miraculous seems to have a similar role in helping to certify private revelations that usually accompany an apparition.”⁶³⁰ Also, private Revelations with prophetic consequence for the public are most often confirmed by miracles that interpret the messages of the visions or apparitions. According to Lisa Schwebel, “notwithstanding the miraculous occurrence of the vision itself, miracles of confirmation are a traditional characteristic of religious apparitional experiences. They signify that the message or teaching contained in the vision is from God, and that it has been correctly delivered and interpreted.”⁶³¹

In carrying out the investigation, Karl Rahner warned that everything should aim at achieving the purpose of the investigation and not to stifle the Spirit through an excessive monitoring by the authority or to neglect the authority. The truth is that authority and gift of charisms are from the same source with aim of building the body of Christ, the Church. “Now it is no doubt a rule, a normative principle and a law for the spiritual gifts themselves, that they should operate in an ‘orderly’ way, that they are not permitted to depart from the order prescribed by authority. As a consequence it is possible to use as a criterion of their authentic spiritual origin the fact whether or not they do this. Yet this formal rule alone would not of itself guarantee the actual existence of harmony. For though official authority might be sufficiently protected by the rule from merely apparent spiritual gifts, the charismata also need to be protected from the authorities.”⁶³² In essence, he is calling for measures that will protect those endowed with special gifts of the Spirit to be protected from high handedness of authorities sometimes. Be that as it may, there is not much official measures or principles to ensure that the authorities do not stifle the Spirit in the Church now. The understanding that the gifts of authority and charismata are from the same source and compliment each other will go a long way in enhancing their roles in the Church. The relationship between the hierarchical gift and

⁶²⁸ Jelly, “Discerning the Miraculous,” 45.

⁶²⁹ Ratzinger, *The Ratzinger Report*, 112.

⁶³⁰ Jelly, “Discerning the Miraculous,” 45.

⁶³¹ Schwebel, *Apparitions, Healings, and Weeping Madonnas*, 129.

⁶³² Karl Rahner, *The Dynamic Element in the Church* (Freiburg: Herder, 1964), 52.

charismatic gifts in the recent document from the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Iuvenescit Ecclesia*, made it clear that they are complementary and each one plays a particular role in the building of the Church. “It emerges that the Scriptural texts do not present an opposition between the diverse charisms; rather they see a harmonic connection and complementarity between them.... Paul gathers in one list the recipients of the charisms of authority and teaching, of charisms that are useful to the ordinary life of the community, and of the more striking charisms. Both he and Peter give the charismatics instructions on the way to exercise their charisms. Their attitude is, above all, one of favorable welcoming; they are convinced of the divine origin of the charisms; they do not, however, consider these gifts as authorizing one to withdraw the obedience owed towards the ecclesial hierarchy, or as bestowing the right to an autonomous ministry.”⁶³³ Paul has to intervene in the way he did in his first letter to the Corinthians, to maintain a proper decorum for the worship and prayers. The gift of authority and charisms are of the same Spirit for the betterment of the body of Christ and not to sow a seed of discord.

Nevertheless, there are some difficulties a person who experiences vision or Revelation is likely to encounter along the line from the authorities of the Church. Such oppositions may not be a sign of authenticity or inauthenticity. Karl Rahner observed that “to suffer opposition to the charisma within the Church is no proof against the mission from above and the authority of the gift. Certainly the Church has the right and duty of discernment of the spirit even to the point of completely rejecting a claim that this or that spirit is from God. But that does not mean that every contradiction, delay, distrust that is aroused in the Church or her authorities against a charisma is itself a sign that this prophet has not been sent by Yahweh.”⁶³⁴

Finally, the report of private Revelations has reached alarming rate in this contemporary period that those at the helm of affairs are worried. Cardinal Francis Arinze, once the Prefect of the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments, expressed Rome’s reservations about it in his speech: “It is a negative sign when some Christians follow reported seers or visionaries, they follow them, they feed daily on their

⁶³³ Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, “*Iuvenescit Ecclesia*, Letter to the Bishops of the Catholic Church Regarding the Relationship between Hierarchical and Charismatic Gifts in the Life and the Mission of the Church,” (2016): no. 7, http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_20160516_iuvenescit-ecclesia_en.html.

⁶³⁴ Rahner, *The Dynamic Element in the Church*, 79.

writings and utterances, but they won't read the Gospels, they won't read the Catechism of the Catholic Church, they won't read the documents of the pope. It's very difficult to know in practice if a reported apparition is really from God, or if it is only the fruit of somebody's over-fertile imagination, somebody's pious ideas, somebody who does not distinguish between reality and dream.... It is very difficult to know when they are the result of deceit of the devil.”⁶³⁵ It is clear that the task of discerning private Revelations is not an easy job at all even with the guidelines in place. The extraordinary realities are more complex than one can imagine. In the opinion of John Thavis, “the standards may have appeared clear enough on paper, but claims of divine messages and visions rarely fell into neat categories of “positive” and “negative.” More often they involved a complicated mix of pious fervor, faulty recollections, and contradictory testimony. Often, judgement seemed to depend on the spiritual leanings of the bishop himself.”⁶³⁶ Furthermore, Fredrick Jelly reiterated the difficulty in the application of these norms from a personal experience. He was a member of the committee that investigated an alleged apparition in the diocese of Lubbock, Texas in America in 1988. According to him, “the prudent application of these norms or criteria is no simple task. Having served on investigative commissions, I am well aware of the complicated questions that arise when the attempt is made to ascertain the real facts in order to arrive at a judgment.”⁶³⁷ Be that as it may, in recent times, the Church makes use of best scientific data available during the canonical trial of miracles of a would-be saint.

4.1.3.1. Relationship between the Church and Modern Science

Before the Council of Trent, there was not any serious and rigorous procedure in the approval of miracles. They were based on popular acclamation and *sensus fidelium*, the universal acknowledgement from the faithful. It was after seventeenth century that science was involved in the investigations of alleged miracles. In the words of Michael O'Neill, “it wasn't until the beginning of the seventeenth century that miracle claims were more rigorously investigated and began to rely on science in addition to the prayerful discernment that had marked investigations of the past. In establishing an event as having supernatural character and being worthy of belief, the bishops and their investigative commissions hope to use scientific inquiry and modern technology to arrive at these

⁶³⁵ Arinze, “Apparitions, Visions, Locutions, and Cardinal Arinze.”

⁶³⁶ Thavis, *The Vatican Prophecies*, 249.

⁶³⁷ Jelly, “Discerning the Miraculous,” 47.

difficult decisions with moral certitude that the alleged miracle cannot be attributable to natural causes or human delusion.”⁶³⁸

Science has made a tremendous effort in the understanding of the reality and continues to make progress on a daily basis. The conception of the nature and laws of nature keep on changing with each epoch. The understanding of the reality has shifted from the Newtonian worldview to post-Newtonian understanding. The world is no more seen as a finished product left to run its course. “Instead, we have a universe constantly maintained in being, a tune perpetually on God’s lips rather than a pot created, finished and then left to stand by itself. God does not ‘set the universe rolling’ and then let it go but is constantly present to it, sustaining it and interpenetrating it.”⁶³⁹ That is the general providence which entails a theological understanding that God creates and sustains the world every minute of the day. Nevertheless, that does not exclude God from intervening in the world in a way that is unusual to what people know. In other words known as special Divine providence or miracle. That is what one sees in the healing and raising from the dead which are inexplicable in the medical field. There are some similarities between the actual performance of both religion and medical science somehow. “Clerics and doctors together are tasked with bringing their elaborate systems of knowledge to bear upon an individual problem of suffering. Confronted with a sick person, both doctors and saint makers must observe each situation carefully, gathering evidence, reading ‘signs’ that connect the particular to the established canons of wisdom from their respective disciplines. The evidence is the same; the method is the same; it is the interpretation that differs.”⁶⁴⁰

The difference in their interpretation of the reality should not make one to discredit any view because each is coming from a particular angle. In the opinion of Jacalyn Duffin, “the difference between these two perspectives does not require us to discredit any of the testimony as lying or wishful thinking. Rather, it resides in the interpretation of the evidence. For doctors, the medical canon is immersed in an antideistic tradition,... For religion, all plausible scientific explanations, be they human or natural, must first be eliminated before the case becomes a contender as a reliable sign of transcendence or

⁶³⁸ O’Neill, *Exploring the Miraculous*, 36-37.

⁶³⁹ Corner, *Signs of God, Miracles and their Interpretations*, 44.

⁶⁴⁰ Duffin, *Medical Miracles*, 188.

holiness. In both cases, what is left is that which is unknown; religious observers are prepared to call it God.”⁶⁴¹

Religion respects the conclusions of science and accepts their analysis provided they do not contradict God’s Revelations. The Church cannot pronounce any cure miraculous once there seems to be a medical solution or a link to medical treatment for such. Hence, “the clerics question every witness and they readily defer to the opinion of scientists. They withhold a judgement of supernatural agency until they are convinced that the diagnoses are accurate, the investigations and treatments up-to-date, and the experts prepared to label the events inexplicable. In this sense, religion celebrates and endorses medical science, and it appears to have no need to refute it. Religion relies on the best of human wisdom before it imposes a judgement from inspired doctrine.”⁶⁴² As a result of the Church’s disposition towards medical science, she employs such in the procedure for the canonization.

4.1.3.2. The Process of Canonization of Saints

In the *Divinus Perfectionis Magister*, John Paul II says, “it is the right of diocesan Bishops or Bishops of the Eastern Rite and others who have the same powers in law, within the limits of their own jurisdiction, either ex officio or upon the request of individual members of the faithful or of legitimate groups and their representatives, to inquire about the life, virtues or martyrdom and reputation of sanctity or martyrdom, alleged miracles, as well as, if it be the case, ancient cult of the Servant of God, whose canonization is sought.”⁶⁴³ There are two major inquiries in the process of canonization. First, a heroic life which determines the second, the ability of the would-be saint to intercede for people. Jacalyn Duffin says that “the canonization process included two types of legalistic scrutiny: the first, into the supposedly exemplary life of the saint; the second, into the claims that the would-be saint had worked miracles.”⁶⁴⁴

According to the *Sanctorum Mater*, Instruction for Conducting Diocesan or Eparchial Inquiries in the Causes of Saints, “before deciding to initiate the cause, the diocesan or eparchial Bishop must verify if, among a significant portion of the people of God, the Servant of God enjoys an authentic and widespread reputation of holiness or of

⁶⁴¹ Duffin, 189.

⁶⁴² Duffin, 185.

⁶⁴³ John Paul II, “*Divinus Perfectionis Magister*” (hereafter DPM), (January 25, 1983): no. 1, http://www.causesanti.va/content/causadeisanti/it/documenti/divinus-perfectionis-magister_en.html.

⁶⁴⁴ Duffin, *Medical Miracles*, 15.

martyrdom as well as an authentic and widespread reputation of intercessory power.”⁶⁴⁵ On the other hand, in the investigation of alleged miraculous healing, the bishop must involve the medical expert or any other technical expert as the case may be.⁶⁴⁶

4.1.3.3. The Canonical Trial of Healing Miracles by the Church

According to John Thavis, “the congregation’s first step is to evaluate evidence that the sainthood candidate lived a life of holiness, a life worthy of imitation by all Christians. Once that is confirmed, it looks for evidence of intercession: that prayers to the candidate resulted in a miracle or favor granted by God. For the congregation, a miracle is divine confirmation of its judgement on the holiness of the person, a sign that this would-be saint is truly in heaven.”⁶⁴⁷ There are two main places where the Church applies canonical trial of miracles as Guiseppe Tanzella-Nitti rightly noted: “For the most part they are healings that occurred in some religious context, that is, a context related to prayer or other manifestations of faith.’ And the second place where the canonical trial of miracles is obtainable is ‘in order to verify the miracles attributed to the intercession of those people for whom, after their death, the causes of beatification and canonization have been opened.”⁶⁴⁸ In the tradition of Catholic Church, miracles attributed to the intercession of a would-be saint is to certify that he or she is in heaven. However, the reason for the miracles in the canonization is mostly misunderstood by Catholics and non-Catholics alike. It is not to prove the existence of God but to prove that the lives of the candidates for canonization are worthy of emulation by other Christians.⁶⁴⁹ Besides, God manifests his merciful love and glory to humanity through them. Hence, the primary aim of miracles with regard to the ones presented during beatification or canonization is for the glory of God. The secondary purpose is to attest to the sanctity of a would-be saint before God.⁶⁵⁰ Through the intercession of would-be saints, people gain God’s mercy and temporal salvation.

⁶⁴⁵ Congregation for the Causes of Saints, “*Sanctorum Mater*, Instruction for Conducting Diocesan or Eparchial Inquiries in the Causes of Saints” (hereafter SM), (May 17, 2007): no. 7, http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/csaints/documents/rc_con_csaints_doc_20070517_sanctorum-mater_en.html.

⁶⁴⁶ SM, 60.

⁶⁴⁷ Thavis, *The Vatican Prophecies*, 177.

⁶⁴⁸ Tanzella-Nitti, “Miracles,” VII.

⁶⁴⁹ Thavis, *The Vatican Prophecies*, 178.

⁶⁵⁰ Catholics United for the Faith, “The Church’s Teaching on Miracles,” *Lay Witness Magazine*, April /May 2004, Sign of Faith, <http://www.cuf.org/2004/04/above-and-beyond-the-churchs-teaching-on-miracles/print/>.

The Church does not create saints instead acknowledges the sanctity of their life. In the words of Jacalyn Duffin, “if the deceased is truly a saint, she resides in heaven with God. Only God can work miracles, but the saint can intercede on behalf of those who appeal to her. A happy outcome is called an ‘act of grace’; however, if it is thought to exceed the boundaries of nature and craft, it may be subjected to further scrutiny and designated a ‘miracle,’ thereby becoming evidence—a ‘sign’—of the saint’s holiness in proximity to God.”⁶⁵¹ According to Michael O’Neill, “miracles also go through such an intense and rigorous process when they are being offered as proof of the intercessory power of a potential saint in a canonization cause. The vast majority (99.9 percent) of all miracles used in modern canonization causes are medical healings.”⁶⁵² Medical healings represent the majority of what the Catholic Church calls miracles for which there are canonical procedures for determining them. The issue of miraculous healings taking place in Our Lady of Lourdes’ grotto in a little town in France is an example. There are thousands of alleged claims of miracles there, but the International Lourdes Medical Committee has canonically certified only 69 claims.⁶⁵³ This goes a long way to show how scrupulous and strict the medical board is. The Church is still making use of the decree of Benedict XIV to formulate the testimony of miraculous healings. According to him, there are seven criteria that must be met for such an alleged claim to be considered as a miraculous healing. They are as follows: 1. “It is necessary that the sickness be considered grave and serious, something which renders a cure impossible or at least extremely difficult; 2. the extraordinary deed must not overlap with that which could reasonably be considered the beginning of a natural healing; 3. No medical cures can have been applied regarding the illness in question, or if they have been applied, they must not have caused any positive effect; 4. the healing must have taken place immediately and instantaneously; 5. the healing must have taken place totally and definitively; 6. the healing must not have followed upon any physiological crises which at times resolve certain pathologies in an unexpected and sudden way (for example, by means of the expulsion of foreign bodies); 7. The illness, in the end, must not have returned after a certain period of time.”⁶⁵⁴ These criteria would help to convince the Congregation for the Causes of Saints that a particular claim is indeed of Divine origin.

⁶⁵¹ Duffin, *Medical Miracles*, 16.

⁶⁵² O’Neill, *Exploring Miraculous*, 80.

⁶⁵³ Lourdes Sanctuaire, “Healings and Miracles,” accessed February 28, 2018, <https://www.lourdes-france.org/en/healings-and-miracles>.

⁶⁵⁴ Tanzella-Nitti, “Miracles,” VII.

Medical healings are chosen for some reasons in line with the laid down principles. Most events in life move very fast that one does not have the opportunity of committing them to God in prayers. Most often than not during sickness people have the opportunity of praying or being prayed for. They may pray through a would-be saint imploring God's intervention in their situation. John Thavis explains the reasons for the choice of healings in the procedure for canonization. Thus he says, "in order to be corroborated, the miracle must be something verifiable—another reason why medical conditions, which are typically well documented by unbiased professionals, are ideal. Any healing that is presented as a possible miracle must be sudden, complete, permanent, and unexplained by any medical therapy employed. The *Consulta Medica* examines the prognosis, the diagnosis, and the treatment."⁶⁵⁵

On a more serious note, it is not the duty of *Consulta Medica* to pronounce inexplicable healing a miracle. "If the judgment is positive, the medical experts simply state that there is no scientific explanation for what occurred. That opens the door for the *Consulta Teologica*, the theologians who must determine a connection between prayers and divine intervention. This is a trickier assessment, because it involves personal recollections and spiritual realities, not the empirical data provided by medical records."⁶⁵⁶ The *Consulta Teologica* cannot come up with an absolute certainty in their judgment because it is not the case of empirical data. Hence, the judgment of *Consulta Teologica* is that of moral certitude as against absolute scientific certainty of science. Worthy of note is that moral certitude has some margin of error as a judgement.⁶⁵⁷ Be that as it may, the margin of error does not translate to the weakness of the theological committee. They have the duty of finding the link between the healing and prayer addressed to God through a particular would-be saint from the evidence provided.⁶⁵⁸ Nevertheless, that they could not declare an alleged miracle from a would-be saint authentic does not mean that it is not supernatural, rather the theologians may not have seen the connection between the healing and the action of the person or other people in his behalf. Let it be noted that the requirement for miracles is not a Divine law but a Church law which can be changed if need be. There is a practice in the Church called "equivalent canonization," in which miracles are not needed to canonize a would-be saint. Once the promoter of the cause of

⁶⁵⁵ Thavis, *The Vatican Prophecies*, 178.

⁶⁵⁶ Thavis, 178.

⁶⁵⁷ Thavis, 178-9.

⁶⁵⁸ Thavis, 179.

the would-be saint is able to prove his or her heroic life of virtues the person would be canonized.⁶⁵⁹

4.1.3.4. The Role of the Physician in Certifying Miracles

A physician plays an important and essential role in the certifying miracles during the beatification and the canonization procedures. In the words of René Latourelle, “the role of the physician is to determine the condition of the sick person before and after the cure; to observe the disproportion between the cure, on the one hand, and the previous state of the person and the care bestowed upon him or her, on the other, and to say, in the light of past and present experience and of what is known about the normal processes of organic healing, whether or not the event can be given a scientific explanation, or such an explanation may be at least looked for in the future.”⁶⁶⁰ In the evaluation of the evidence for the trial of miracles, every necessary document must be presented for the Guild of Medical Experts to analyse and verify the diagnosis and prognosis for the ease of making an informed opinion about how the healing could have occurred. If the majority are in agreement that the healing seems inexplicable in accord with scientific knowledge, then the proposed case would move to theological consultants for further actions.⁶⁶¹

Regulations for the Medical Board Guild of the Congregation for the Causes of Saints was modified recently in 2016. According to the recent regulations, “A Guild of Medical Experts is established in the Congregation for the Causes of Saints for the examination of healings that are proposed as miraculous for the Beatification of Servants of God and of the Canonization of those who are Beatified. In case of necessity the Congregation can call upon Medical Experts *ad casum* who are not part of the Guild of Medical Experts.”⁶⁶² These experts have to swear an oath to maintain secrecy and due diligence in their work. If the person healed is still living, two medical experts, *ab inspectione*, would have to examine the person separately. They have to use the best clinical and technical instruments available to ascertain the present health status of the person especially with regard to the purported cure.⁶⁶³

⁶⁵⁹ Thavis, 219.

⁶⁶⁰ Latourelle, *The Miracles of Jesus and the Theology of Miracles*, 311-312.

⁶⁶¹ Tanzella-Nitti, “Miracles,” VII.

⁶⁶² Congregation for the Causes of Saints, “Medical Consultation Regulations,” (2016), <http://www.causesanti.va/content/causadeisanti/it/documenti.html>.

⁶⁶³ SM, 109.

According to the latest regulations of the medical board, medical experts are appointed for a term of five years by the Prefect of the Congregation which is renewable after the first tenor. Every medical board has seven members, which include the President and the *ex officio* experts.⁶⁶⁴ The board forms quorum with six members in attendance. The medical experts have to examine the case considering everything necessary and present their opinions before the medical board individually. The board deliberates on the conclusions presented and vote for the inexplicable or explicable nature of such a healing. The board accepts the conclusion with a qualified majority of at least five out of seven experts or four out of six experts present at the same meeting.⁶⁶⁵ On the side of the medical doctors, they cannot be witness to any case they have handled before. It is obvious that they have made their opinion on the inability of medical science to do something in that particular case. For that reason, doctors on the medical board cannot testify in any case they have interest.⁶⁶⁶

It is the duty of the Holy Father to declare a proposed cure miraculous after positive evaluation of the medical board and the *teologia consulta* sequentially. In words of Michael O'Neill, "in the Catholic Church, the act of canonization is reserved to the Holy See and occurs at the conclusion of a long process requiring extensive proof that the proposed person for canonization lived and died in such an exemplary and holy way that he or she is worthy to be recognized as a saint. The Church's official recognition of sanctity implies that these persons are now in heavenly glory and that they may be publicly invoked and mentioned officially in the liturgy of the Church, most especially in the Litany of the Saints."⁶⁶⁷

4.2. Functions of Miracles

The significance of miracles is enormous in the life of people who believe in the omnipotence of God. "For the Israelite, the importance of the miracle lies not so much in its being a break in the laws of nature as in its purpose. The modern study of miracles has moved in this direction, seeking to define the theological significance of these wonders. In this way the miracle, far from being considered as an isolated display of God's power over the laws of nature, finds its place and function in the execution of the

⁶⁶⁴ Congregation for the Causes of Saints, "Medical Consultation Regulations."

⁶⁶⁵ Congregation for the Causes of Saints.

⁶⁶⁶ O'Neill, *Exploring Miraculous*, 91.

⁶⁶⁷ O'Neill, 81-2.

overall design of divine Providence for the Redemption of Israel and all humankind.”⁶⁶⁸ Miracles in the contemporary Catholic understanding goes beyond the idea of unique and isolated occurrences to the purpose of the marvellous actions. Miracles are not an opportunity for God to showcase his power to his people, rather they are signs and means of Divine manifestation. Equally, they serve as a means of educating the people about the reality of God and his nature in a tangible form. This idea is in line with the opinion of C. Sant and R.F. Collins, who said that “miracles also provided an effective instrument for the religious education of Israel [Dt 9.26; Psalm 76(77); 81(82); 104(105)–107(108)]; they awakened fundamental religious feelings and attitudes through concrete symbolical representation of the truth.”⁶⁶⁹

Apostle Peter in his Pentecost message to the people highlighted the significance of Jesus’ miracles: “Jesus of Nazareth, a man attested to you by God with deeds of power, wonders, and signs that God did through him among you, as you yourselves know this man, handed over to you according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of those outside the law. But God raised him up, having freed him from death, because it was impossible for him to be held in its power (Acts 2:22-24). Similarly, John Paul II commenting on the text above and says, “this testimony includes a synthesis of the whole messianic activity of Jesus of Nazareth, whom God had commended by ‘mighty deeds, wonders and signs.’ It also constitutes an outline of the first Christian catechesis, which is offered to us by the head of the apostolic college, Peter.”⁶⁷⁰ Miracles of Jesus brought awareness that the kingdom of God has made inroad into the world revealing the identity of Christ as the true Son of God. According to Pope John Paul II, the Johannine Gospel gave the correct interpretation of the meaning of the mighty deeds of Jesus with the term ‘sign.’ With the term ‘sign’ “he wished to indicate the most essential element of those facts, namely, the revelation of God’s action in Jesus.”⁶⁷¹

The Gospels contain the narratives about the intention of Jesus’ miraculous works and that of his apostles. Our souls are the immortal aspect of our being and saving them means our salvation. Our bodies surely will die one day even when healed miraculously from any illness. Miracles have the aim of saving humanity from the clutches of the evil one

⁶⁶⁸ Sant and Collins, “Miracle,” 663.

⁶⁶⁹ Sant and Collins, 663.

⁶⁷⁰ John Paul II, “Miraculous Signs Reveal Christ’s Power, General Audience,” para. 2.

⁶⁷¹ John Paul II, para. 8.

holding them bondage. Accordingly, “Jesus made his mission clearly known-to free humanity from evil and first of all from sin, spiritual evil. This mission implies and explains his struggle with the evil spirit who is the prime author of evil in human history. As we read in the Gospels, Jesus repeatedly declared that this is the meaning of his work and of that of his apostles. We read in Luke: “I have observed Satan fall like lightning from the sky. Behold, I have given you the power to tread...upon the full force of the enemy and nothing will harm you” (Lk 10:18-19).”⁶⁷² On the other hand, Jesus’ marvellous works initiate the coming kingdom of God. According to, *Lumen Gentium*, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, “the Miracles of Jesus also confirm that the Kingdom has already arrived on earth: ‘If I cast out devils by the finger of God, then the kingdom of God has come upon you.’ Before all things, however, the Kingdom is clearly visible in the very Person of Christ, the Son of God and the Son of Man, who came ‘to serve and to give His life as a ransom for many.’”⁶⁷³

Miracles have many purposes they tend to achieve in the life every Christian who accepts them and what they portend. They communicate the glory of God and call people to salvation. The wonders worked by Jesus revealed his Divine authority.⁶⁷⁴ From the perspective of the Scripture, Christ’s miracles have these purposes: manifestations of the power and love of God, the coming kingdom, the authenticating of a divine mission and the messengers, accredit Christ as the Son of God, and are symbols of the world of grace and the sacraments.⁶⁷⁵ All these meaning of miracles are complimentary. They are interwoven in the whole idea of one miraculous event.

4.2.1. Communication between God and Humanity

Miracles are signs and as such have some messages to communicate to people who have experienced them. Communication does not end with words or spoken words but includes signs. In the case of miracles, they are symbolic signs which have their meaning beyond visible signs or acts. According to René Latourelle, “miracles belong to the same category as *words*. Their place is in the world of signs which persons use to manifest and exchange their thoughts. They are not simply traces or vestiges of a presence and an action, but express an intention to seek inter-personal communication. They are signs which

⁶⁷² John Paul II, para. 6.

⁶⁷³ LG, 5.

⁶⁷⁴ Catholics United for the Faith, “The Church’s Teaching on Miracles,” Sign of Faith.

⁶⁷⁵ Latourelle, *The Miracles of Jesus and the Theology of Miracles*, 293-4.

someone gives to someone else, in the same way that we speak of signalling someone to make him or her understand something.”⁶⁷⁶

Hence, miracle as a religious terminology has as its function of communicating God’s will and plans for humanity. The meaning of the word ‘miracle’ should be sort under religion where it belongs properly. Through miracles, God communicates with the people in different fora and manifesting his attributes. “They show God’s intention of entering into a dialogue of friendship with human beings. For God’s intervention in behalf of human beings in order to heal them, liberate them, and restore them to their human dignity can only signify an extraordinary benevolence on his part.”⁶⁷⁷ On an attentive reading of the Scriptures, one discovers how God powerfully via wonders and mighty works communicates his omnipotence, mercy, and love through Jesus Christ and his messengers to his people. “In the Old Testament the *mirabilia* or wonders of the exodus were acts of power and love by which God the Savior drew his people to himself in the bonds of gratitude. So too most of Christ’s miracles are healings, that is, acts of mercy and kindness. Before conveying any special message they are already words of grace, expressions of love.”⁶⁷⁸ Miracles are means and signs of God’s self-communication to the humanity. Through miracles, one enters into a dialogue with God of power, mercy, and love. Who is this that has changed our condition or that has showered so much love on people? Any person that encounters God’s love through miracles is touched in the depth of the person’s being. It is a communion with the divine reality making people disciples of the good news all over the world. In the words of Louis Monden, “the transcendent nature of the miraculous then expresses, in the world which we perceive, that infinite love by which God manifests his election of man in admitting him to supernatural life: it demonstrates that in God’s eyes the immutable glory of his creation is a paltry thing when weighed against his least sign of love for the child born of his grace.”⁶⁷⁹

In fact, miracles help us to be in the mood to listen to the message of God’s plans of salvation. René Latourelle is of the view that “miracle first of all *disposes* us to hear the message, for it is a sign of benevolence, the *word of grace*.... It appears as an address or

⁶⁷⁶ Latourelle, 294.

⁶⁷⁷ Latourelle, 294.

⁶⁷⁸ Latourelle, 294.

⁶⁷⁹ Monden, *Signs and Wonders*, 25.

a response from God. By His miracle, God addresses man, speaks to him, makes a sign to him in nature, with regard to something.”⁶⁸⁰

4.2.2. Revelation

Miracles are means and signs of Divine Revelation and somehow the reality they reveal. God through miraculous actions reveals himself to people. René Latourelle contends that “Christ carries on his revelatory activity in all the ways made available to him as a result of his incarnation: by both words and works, and especially by his miracles and resurrection. His message is that he has come to liberate, cleanse, and save human beings. Miracles for their part show this saving message in action: right before the eyes of men and women the mission of Christ liberate and restore bodies. They describe the mission of Christ in ways perceptible to the senses.”⁶⁸¹ In the opinion of John Paul II, “all the “mighty deeds, wonders and signs” of Christ are for the purpose of revealing him as Messiah, as Son of God, for the revelation of him who alone has the power to free mankind from sin and from death, of him who is truly the Savior of the world.”⁶⁸²

Moreover, John Paul II said that the significance of the miracles of Christ as confessed by the evangelists and primitive Church manifested the power of Christ over the laws of nature. Also, they revealed his true identity as the Son of the Father who has received all authority and power. Hence, “the apostles, the evangelists, and the whole primitive Church saw in each of those miracles the supreme power of Christ over nature and its laws. He who reveals God as Father, Creator and Lord of creation, when performing miracles by his own power, reveals himself as Son, one in being with the Father and equal to him in lordship over creation.”⁶⁸³ Miracles reveal the Divine power of the Son of a man who has the authority to work wonders. Miracles of Christ manifested his glory, and people believed in him as it happened in the first miracle in the Gospel of John; “Jesus did this, the first of his signs, in Cana of Galilee, and revealed his glory; and his disciples believed in him” (John 2:11).

Miracles are words in actions, revealing the inner meaning and purpose of Christ mission. “Furthermore, *in one sense*, there is more in miracles than in discourses. For revelation has an element of the ineffable which a discourse cannot capture. Miracles then come to

⁶⁸⁰ Latourelle, *The Theology of Revelation*, 401.

⁶⁸¹ Latourelle, *The Miracles of Jesus and the Theology of Miracles*, 295.

⁶⁸² John Paul II, “Miraculous Signs Reveal Christ’s Power, para. 12.

⁶⁸³ John Paul II, “Christ’s Miracles: Salvific Signs, para. 1.

the rescue and reveal a further meaning behind the words. By their power of suggestion and their dynamics as symbols, especially in St. John, they speak to both senses and mind; they work on two different levels simultaneously.”⁶⁸⁴ The understanding of the word of God would have been a herculean task without miracles which lead people into the inner meaning of the word of God. Miracles serve as a foretaste of the mystery of salvation within the sensible universe; manifesting in a way the fullness of glory people hope to enjoy on the last day. That is when God’s power would reign supreme over all other powers and everything in the world.⁶⁸⁵ On the other hand, John Paul II says that miracles “serve to reveal his love for us, that merciful love which overcomes evil with good, as is shown by the very presence and action of Jesus Christ in the world. Inasmuch as they are inserted into this economy, the ‘wonders and signs’ are an object of our faith in the plan of God’s salvation and in the mystery of redemption effected by Christ.”⁶⁸⁶

Miracles need the words of interpretation just as the words need them to concretise their messages. They complement each other in clarifying the actions and messages of God in the world. René Latourelle reiterated the mutual relationship existing between miracles and word of God, and said “the message alone tells us of the inconceivable *new thing* that is the source of miracles, namely, the presence of God among us. The message alone illumines and specifies the dimensions of the event that is our salvation in Jesus Christ. Yet miracles and messages are the two faces—visible and invisible—of the one mystery of salvation.”⁶⁸⁷

4.2.3. Attestation

The function of miracles as authenticating signs was emphasised in the Scriptures and are still being reiterated in the life of the Church today. In other words, they authenticate the message and messengers of God before the world. There are two different ways to approach the attestation function of miracles, first, the works of the prophets and apostles and their like, and second, the unique works of Jesus Christ as the Son of man and God.

On the side of the prophets and people in their group, miracles authenticate them and their messages as coming from God. This is necessary whenever there is a need for them to prove that God has sanctioned their messages. Sometimes the teaching they have

⁶⁸⁴ Latourelle, *The Miracles of Jesus and the Theology of Miracles*, 295.

⁶⁸⁵ Latourelle, 295-6.

⁶⁸⁶ John Paul II, “Christ’s Miracles Manifest Salvific Love, General Audience,” para. 9.

⁶⁸⁷ Latourelle, *The Miracles of Jesus and the Theology of Miracles*, 296.

proposed necessitates Divine authentication. According to René Latourelle, “if such miracles occur, they are truly signs that God approves of this man and of his message which he says is from God. For God cannot give the support of his omnipotence to false witness in a matter as serious as human salvation.”⁶⁸⁸ Let it be noted that not all the prophecies must be certified by miracles. It depends on the teaching or the message of the prophet, some of them ordinarily may not require such authentication. Miracles performed by a messenger of God on the cause of their mission has a confirmatory role to play about the identity of the messenger. “Revelation is communication of a message and invitation to believe this message. The miracle is the divine seal upon the message, attestation to its divine origin; it is not the message, but the sign which accredits the witness and authorizes his word.”⁶⁸⁹

On the other hand, Jesus Christ is different from ordinary prophets because of his claim of being the Son of God. As the Son of God, he has all authority and power on earth to do anything. Therefore, “the miracles he works in his own name attest to the truth that he is the Son sent by the Father. This is why St. John speaks of the miracles of Christ as the works of the Son and as the testimony of the Father in behalf of him who claims to be his Son.”⁶⁹⁰ Equally, he reveals the Father to the whole world, since to see him is to see the Father. The document of the Church on Divine Revelation *Dei Verbum*, brings out this idea succinctly when it says, “to see Jesus is to see His Father (John 14:9). For this reason Jesus perfected revelation by fulfilling it through his whole work of making Himself present and manifesting Himself: through His words and deeds, His signs and wonders, but especially through His death and glorious resurrection from the dead and final sending of the Spirit of truth. Moreover, He confirmed with divine testimony what revelation proclaimed, that God is with us to free us from the darkness of sin and death, and to raise us up to life eternal.”⁶⁹¹ He certified the authenticity of his proclamation with his mighty works, most especially his death and resurrection on the cross. John Paul II going further says, “it was those same works and particularly ‘the marvels and signs’ that testified that ‘the kingdom of God was at hand’ (cf. Mk 1:15), that with Jesus it had entered into the

⁶⁸⁸ Latourelle, 296.

⁶⁸⁹ Latourelle, *Theology of Revelation*, 402.

⁶⁹⁰ Latourelle, *The Miracles of Jesus and the Theology of Miracles*, 297.

⁶⁹¹ DV, 4.

earthly history of humanity and was eager to enter into every human spirit. At the same time they were a witness that he who performed them was truly the Son of God.”⁶⁹²

Miracles of Jesus Christ help to strengthen our eschatological hope in the new kingdom by allowing people to see the glimpse of that invisible reality. In the opinion of René Latourelle, “miracles also enlighten us in the profound nature of His message; they show, on the sense plane, the invisible marvels of the new kingdom; they are the symbols of the world of grace and sacrament. Finally, they let us see, by anticipation, the glorious order of the resurrection of bodies and the transformation of the cosmos, at the end of time.”⁶⁹³ Similarly, Walter Kasper stressed the function of miracles which are noticed in the power of Jesus over the evil one. He has revealed the new kingdom and power operative in it. “If it is by the finger of God that ‘I’ cast out demons, then the Kingdom of God has come upon you’ (Lk 11.20). In other words, the miracles have as a second function to attest the eschatological *exousia* of Jesus (Mt 7.29; 9.6, 8 etc.). The miracles are signs of Jesus’ mission and authority. He is not only the Messiah of words, but also the Messiah of action. He brings the kingdom by word and work. But Jesus does not perform these acts of power merely to demonstrate his messianic authority.”⁶⁹⁴

The explanation John gave about his limited miracle narratives provided the actual aim of the marvellous works of Christ in the context of biblical narratives. He did the signs on purpose. Moreover, according to Johannine account, “these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through this belief you may have life in his name” (John 20:31). “This is the aim of both the Synoptics and the Fourth Gospel-to show by means of the miracles the truth of the Son of God and to lead to the faith which is the beginning of salvation,”⁶⁹⁵ John Paul II asserts. In the Gospel narrative about the resurrection of Lazarus Jesus said, “I knew that you always hear me, but I have said this for the sake of the crowd standing here, so that they may believe that you sent me” (John 11:42). This is another importance of the miracles Jesus performed confirming his Divine power and the intention of his actions. As the Son of God, Christ has the power to heal, forgive sins, cast out demons, and raise people back to life. In fact, he is God made visible and his miracles confirmed his teachings. “God’s affirmation, in this case, must confirm this central truth of His message: namely: that He is God, and, at the same

⁶⁹² John Paul II, “Miraculous Signs Reveal Christ’s Power,” para. 3.

⁶⁹³ Latourelle, *Theology of Revelation*, 400 -1.

⁶⁹⁴ Kasper, *Jesus the Christ*, 84.

⁶⁹⁵ John Paul II, “Miraculous Signs Reveal Christ’s Power,” para. 9.

time, all the doctrine which He announces. The Church claims to continue the existence of Christ-God: historically (apostolicity), morally (sanctity), doctrinally (continuity in faith). The miracle, in her case, must attest that God recognizes the truth of her continuity with Christ and with God; it attests the divine origin of her doctrine and her power for sanctification.”⁶⁹⁶ René Latourelle commenting on the position of First Vatican Council on miracles as revealing the Divine origin of the Church said that “the Church teaching office calls attention to an important function of miracle, namely, its confirmative role: God’s approbation, God’s seal on a word which claims to be His. The council moreover explicitly refers to the text of the Gospel of Mark on the sending of the apostles: ‘But they went out and preached everywhere, the Lord cooperating with them and confirming the word through the miracles which accompanied it’ (Mk. 16:20).”⁶⁹⁷

4.2.4. Liberation and Enhancement

René Latourelle states that the functions of miracles are not limited to Revelation and accreditation but includes “to *liberate* human beings and *bring them to their fulfilment*. In their deepest selves human beings aspire to a fullness that they cannot attain by themselves. But in Christ, who turns a person out of his senses into a healthy one possessing his true dignity or a sick one into one set free of infirmities or a sinner into one set free of Satan and his bonds, human beings find the possibility of a liberation and fulfilment they could not have obtained by themselves.”⁶⁹⁸ And by so doing, Jesus strengthens the people’s hope in the new kingdom of God prophesied in the old. That is where there will be no more sorrow. Consequentially, miracles have changed the condition and view of those who have experienced them and rekindled their hope in God and his will to save them definitely on the last day. For such people “miracles are liberating, transforming interventions of God; they are like hands outstretched to receive and raise up. To individuals whose life is diminished by sickness; to men and women who are no longer counted among the living because they are not productive, to those excluded from the religious community because of a legal uncleanness; and even to those out of their senses, who are no longer masters of themselves because they are subject to Satan—to all these Jesus restores physical and psychic integrity and human dignity, and, more

⁶⁹⁶ Latourelle, *Theology of Revelation*, 402.

⁶⁹⁷ Latourelle, 389.

⁶⁹⁸ Latourelle, *The Miracles of Jesus and the Theology of Miracles*, 259.

importantly, he delivers them from sin.”⁶⁹⁹ This liberation, in fact, is the beginning of the new world and new life in Christ in which miracles have shown in a special way.

According to Walter Kasper, miracles are possible under the hope we have for something new coming into the present world. That is the hope in the new kingdom of God that will change the present condition into a better one. Thus he says “to deny the possibility of miracles would be to abandon this basic human hope. Certainly for the biblical conception of the Kingdom a faith with no room for miracles would be hollow. Jesus’ miracles mean the penetration of the Kingdom of God into our ordinary, physical world, and because of this they are signs of hope for the world.”⁷⁰⁰ In other words, to deny this hope people have in the new kingdom of God is to reject the significance of miracles.

Miracles are signs of the love of God through Christ to humanity especially to those who are suffering. John Paul II articulated this notion lucidly in his treatise on miracles in his General Audience when he said, “they also reveal God’s love for humanity-particularly for those who suffer, who are in need, who implore healing, pardon and compassion.”⁷⁰¹ Through his miracles, Jesus sets people free from physical and spiritual illnesses holding them ransom. This is in line with God’s plan of salvation for humanity which his Son, Jesus Christ, proclaimed and actualised with words and mighty works.⁷⁰² Another pertinent value of miracles is the spiritual enlightenment and grace they offer to people. Miracles have values in the sense that they offer spiritual insights to people who may be interested or uninterested in the issue of the miraculous signs.⁷⁰³

No one has encountered God’s mercy and love through miracles and remains the same. Their knowledge about the meaning of the good news deepens such that it becomes clearer to them what the message of salvation entails. “It is not a matter of chance that the recipients of miracles themselves become, in some cases, *heralds* of Gospel, as for example, the possessed man among the Gerasenes (Mk 5:20) or the leper (Mk 10:52, Lk 18: 43). Thus miracles not only bring salvation to human beings but also enhance and transform their lives, turning them from slaves into disciples of Jesus and heralds of the kingdom.”⁷⁰⁴ René Latourelle contends that “this liberate and promotive function of

⁶⁹⁹ Latourelle, 297.

⁷⁰⁰ Kasper, *Jesus the Christ*, 84.

⁷⁰¹ John Paul II, “Christ’s Miracles Manifest Salvific Love,” para. 1.

⁷⁰² John Paul II, para. 2.

⁷⁰³ Thavis, *The Vatican Prophecies*, 195.

⁷⁰⁴ Latourelle, *The Miracles of Jesus and the Theology of Miracles*, 297.

miracles is one that speaks to our contemporaries, who aspire with indomitable spirit to freedom and full self-development. Miracles speak to them at the very heart of their deepest longings. As a result, the credibility of miracles is greatly increased. By highlighting the liberation and transformation that the Gospel proclaims, miracles accredit this Gospel as authentic good news.”⁷⁰⁵ This marks the beginning of transformation which will culminate on the last day when everything and everybody will submit to the lordship of Jesus Christ. On account of this, one can say that the transformation has started with the actions of Christ in the world, healings and casting out demons. He handed over this mission to his apostles to carry out until the end of the time. Hence, “between Genesis and Apocalypse, which is the time of Israel and the Church, miracle is a beam of light, prefiguring the full light to come. It shows that the glorified body of Christ is at work to restore creation to its lost splendor. It announces and prefigures the definitive transformation of the universe when the power of God, after having destroyed death and sin, will establish all things in unfailing newness.”⁷⁰⁶

Miracles as agents of liberation and reinforcement will necessarily make people bold and audacious to speak out about what they believe. They are no more the same persons after experiencing the ineffable grace of God. “The casting out of demons is meant to release men to follow Jesus and share in the Kingdom of God. Discipleship also means mission, and Jesus therefore gives his disciples not only authority in word but authority in action: that is, to work miracles (Mk 6.7; Mt 10.1; Lk 9.1). In this way Jesus’ miracles bring about the eschatological gathering together of the people of God. This gathering together concerns particularly the lost, the poor, the weak and the rejected. They are here and now to experience symbolically the salvation and love of God so that they can bear witness of it to others.”⁷⁰⁷

4.2.5. Invitation to Christian Living

Today just like in the apostolic era miracles have greatly impacted the spiritual life of people from different perspectives. The life of faith of many people has been strengthened and enriched because of Divine love they have experienced or seen in the life of others. Some people who do not believe in God have received conversion as a result of their encounter with the boundless love and mercy of God. Miracles in a way helped them to

⁷⁰⁵ Latourelle, 297-8.

⁷⁰⁶ Latourelle, *Theology of Revelation*, 400.

⁷⁰⁷ Kasper, *Jesus the Christ*, 85.

make a decision about their faith and pursue holiness of life. Thereby answering the call to enter the new kingdom of God through the gifts of the Holy Spirit in Christ to God the Father. These gifts enable one to enjoy the love existing between the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. “Miracles are supernatural signs that occur in the natural world. God’s miracles teach us about what is beyond creation.... While miracles communicate a specific message, they are essentially a sign of God’s glory and His loving plan of salvation. Finally, miracles are a call to faith-they appeal to our reason so that our faith may grow.”⁷⁰⁸

A Miraculous encounter is a call to discipleship which leads one to proclaim the good news in the world. It releases those who are held down by sickness and evil one to serve God in an active capacity with their life as testimonies. To them Christ has given the authority to go out to the whole world and proclaim the good news, cast out the devil, and heal the sick.⁷⁰⁹ Miracles rekindle faith and let people live their life as they ought to do. Furthermore, miracles are a reminder to the ever-presence of Christ with his people even during trying moments of their life. In the words of John Paul II, “this is true even in the most tempestuous periods of history in which the human spirit might possibly be tempted by a doubt about Jesus’ divine assistance. Christian preaching and spirituality frequently interpret the miracle as a sign of Jesus’ presence and a guarantee of trust in him on the part of Christians and of the Church.”⁷¹⁰ This idea is clear from the nature miracles where he calmed the storm and walked on the sea assuring his people of his ever-presence in their lives on earth. Finally, the significance of Christ miracles can be summed up as revealing his almighty power and his Divine mission on earth.

4.2.5.1. Miracles, Conversion, and Faith

Faith in the official declaration of the First Vatican Council “is the beginning of human salvation, the Catholic Church professes to be a supernatural virtue, by means of which, with the grace of God inspiring and assisting us, we believe to be true what He has revealed, not because we perceive its intrinsic truth by the natural light of reason, but because of the authority of God himself, who makes the revelation and can neither deceive nor be deceived.”⁷¹¹ Louis Monden commenting on the above definition said that this

⁷⁰⁸ Catholics United for the Faith, “The Church’s Teaching on Miracles,” Sign of Faith.

⁷⁰⁹ Kasper, *Jesus the Christ*, 85.

⁷¹⁰ John Paul II, “Christ’s Miracles: Salvific Signs,” para. 5.

⁷¹¹ First Vatican Council, “Dogmatic Constitution on the Catholic Faith, 1869-1870,” 3.

faith which is the beginning of human salvation is “a response on our part, to God who has called us, faith introduces us to the dialogue of the Father with Word, in the unity of the Holy Spirit. Thus we share with him the innermost secrets of his own life.”⁷¹² Because of the limited nature of people they still look for something perceptible to solidify the faith they have received through the gift of the Spirit. That was what First Vatican Council alluded to when it calls people’s attention to the role of miracles in our faith: “Nevertheless, in order that the submission of our faith should be in accordance with reason, it was God’s will that there should be linked to the internal assistance of the Holy Spirit external indications of his revelation, that is to say divine acts, and first and foremost miracles and prophecies, which clearly demonstrating as they do the omnipotence and infinite knowledge of God, are the most certain signs of revelation and are suited to the understanding of all.”⁷¹³

According to René Latourelle, in the Gospels these three things, miracles, conversion, and faith always go hand in hand: “For since miracles and the coming of salvation in Jesus Christ are inseparable as signs of the kingdom that is at hand, they are at the same time a call to conversion and an invitation to faith in the person who comes to establish the kingdom.”⁷¹⁴ Miracles have aims to achieve in the life of the recipients and those around, especially conversion of those who are still doubting the Divine love in our means. Equally, miracles act as an aid to strengthen those who are weak in the faith. “When Christ performs a miracle, at the same time he urges the recipient to conversion and to faith in his mission. This connection between external wonder and interior conversion, this establishment of a transforming relationship between Christ and the beneficiary of his action (sic), is a distinguishing mark of Christian miracles.”⁷¹⁵ Some healings in the Scriptures reflect the relationship between miracle and conversion. The healing of the paralytic in Mark (2:1-12) and the invalid at the pool of Bethzetha: “see you are well! Sin no more, that nothing worse may befall you” (John 5:14). The three Galilean Lake towns, Chorazin, Capernaum and Bethsaida, Christ rebuked were found wanting in this relationship between miracles and conversion. Christ did some miracles there as signs of the coming kingdom of God, but they were unwilling to prepare for it through repentance and conversion. René Latourelle submits that “if the kingdom is at hand, then men and

⁷¹² Monden, *Signs and Wonders*, 81.

⁷¹³ First Vatican Council, “Dogmatic Constitution on the Catholic Faith, 1869-1870,” sec. 3.

⁷¹⁴ Latourelle, *The Miracles of Jesus and the Theology of Miracles*, 326.

⁷¹⁵ Latourelle, 326.

women must prepare themselves to enter into it by repentance and conversion. Changes effected in the material order (healings, exorcisms) signify that the human person as such must also change. Miracles are the kingdom itself made visible.”⁷¹⁶ Just like Galilean towns many people have refused to see the opportunities miracles have provided for our salvation. In most apparitions and visions the messages of conversion of heart and return to God through repentance and forgiveness have been recurring decimals. The need for conversion and return to God is needed more now than ever. However, the quest for miraculous healings without any desire to change our old way of life seems to be the case in the contemporary period. Our Lady through her apparitions and the saints have been urging people to answer the call of turning back to God in prayers and penance. By so doing, prepare themselves for the coming kingdom. In words of René Latourelle, “the conversion to which Jesus urges by miracles consists in renouncing everything that is opposed to God’s reign. It supposes an interior ‘change of direction,’ a war against oneself, because the reign in question is that of God and not of selfishness and Satan.”⁷¹⁷

Jesus’ miracles have the function of rescuing people from the stronghold of the evil one through forgiveness of their iniquities. He is interested in people’s salvation properly speaking. “For the salvation of the soul and the redemption of the whole world Jesus performed miracles of the corporeal order also.... ‘Mighty deeds, wonders and signs’ which he performed, Jesus Christ manifested his power to save the human race from the evil which threatens the immortal soul and the vocation to union with God.”⁷¹⁸

There is no gainsaying about the fact that miracles are an object of faith, they dispose people through the inner working of grace to trust in God and his plans for the salvation of humanity. John Paul II reiterated this fact and said, “inasmuch as they are inserted into this economy, the ‘wonders and signs’ are an object of our faith in the plan of God’s salvation and in the mystery of redemption effected by Christ.”⁷¹⁹ Moreover, miracles are connected with the faith in the name of Our Lord Jesus Christ which its absence will make the reality of miracles impossible. Miracles are only possible on the condition of complete trust in the love and mercy of the one who has the power and authority to change everything. In the New Testament faith is presented as necessary condition for miracles. In the healing of the paralytic (Mark 2:5), the centurion’s servant (Matt 8:10), the daughter

⁷¹⁶ Latourelle, 327.

⁷¹⁷ Latourelle, 327.

⁷¹⁸ John Paul II, “Miraculous Signs Reveal Christ’s Power,” para. 1.

⁷¹⁹ John Paul II, “Christ’s Miracles Manifest Salvific Love,” para. 9.

of the Canaanite woman (Matt 2:28), the woman with haemorrhage (Mark 5:34), and the blind man at Jericho (Mark 10: 52), faith played a major role in these healings.

Faith leads one to conversion which its climax is the salvation of the soul. Miracles would lead people towards accepting the message of God which finally translate into salvation. “Jesus brings a salvation that comes only through conversion. His works, his miracles, are therefore the occasion for a choice, as is clear from the dramatic incident of the man born blind (Jn 9). To accept the signs is to accept Jesus and enter upon the path of conversion.”⁷²⁰ Hence, when people accept Christ and the reality he represents, their salvation is assured. Jesus’ miracles show that salvation is here at work. According to René Latourelle, “the miracles show that salvation is present and at work; salvation becomes something of ‘today,’ something that is effectively operative.”⁷²¹ To believe in Jesus means to decide to accept Jesus and all that he represents. When people believe in God, they manifest their inability to save themselves. It is pertinent to mention here that this faith is not a coercive one that would make people go against their will. René Latourelle, contend that “miracles, like faith itself, do not force human freedom, but must be accepted by a personal decision. In both the Synoptic Gospels and the Gospel of John miracles contribute to the birth of faith but they do not necessitate it. In the service of the kingdom they persuade human beings to recognize the ‘visitation of God’; they proclaim salvation to them and urge them to the decision of faith.”⁷²² Be that as it may, miracles are not sufficient for faith but act as an aid to faith with the eternal gift of the Holy Spirit working in our hearts. We cannot see where the word miracle was mentioned in the Apostles’ Creed yet we profess our faith in the two great miracles of the virgin birth of Christ and the resurrection of Christ.⁷²³

4.2.5.2. Miracles and the Life of Faith

The Gospel of Luke describes faith as necessary for miracles to take place. The faith that accepts what God has revealed even though they may not have grasped the whole mystery. It is only in faith that people accept the meaning a miracle portends. Most importantly, miracles are not an end themselves, but a means to conversion and salvation.⁷²⁴ In the life of faith, miracles serve as a call to follow Christ and trust in him

⁷²⁰ Latourelle, *The Miracles of Jesus and the Theology of Miracles*, 260.

⁷²¹ Latourelle, 261.

⁷²² Latourelle, 328.

⁷²³ Valentine, *Miracles*, 11.

⁷²⁴ Latourelle, *The Miracles of Jesus and the Theology of Miracles*, 254.

all the way. In the opinion of René Latourelle, “the word ‘faith’ also signifies the abiding state of authentic Christians. In this context the function of miracles is to give new stimulus and vitality to the faith which Christians should be living fully. For faith is not something acquired once and for all but rather a conquest that is always vulnerable and in need of protection because it is always threatened, always exposed to danger both in individuals and in communities. In the life of faith miracles are an invitation to modern Christians no less than they were to the Christians of the early Church.”⁷²⁵

Miracle as a sign which points to the new kingdom, the future glory of the saved humanity and a glimpse of hope within our inner being creates some tension in our quest to comprehend this reality which is ineffable. The tension comes to light on considering the limitedness of humanity in this world and omnipotence of God manifested in his healing and setting people free from the bondage of devil. “A miracle comes as a shock because it is utterly exceptional and cannot be fitted into the familiar patterns; it also introduces a disturbing factor into the seamless web of earthly security, it is upsetting and, indeed, is calculated to upset. Miracles are mysterious, but in addition, and more importantly, they force human beings to ask questions about the ultimate meaning of the human person and the universe.”⁷²⁶ Now the questions are; do people understand miracles? No. Have they experienced something? Yes. It is here that the grace of God working in people’s hearts helps them to accept the reality with faith and trust in the power of almighty God who has revealed these things through miracles. People have attempted to answer these questions raised by the miraculous events either through science or religion. With scientific methodology, they tend to answer these questions through analogy with laws of nature or reject them as inconsequential matters. On the contrary, religion tends to elucidate the events as mysterious and accepts them with faith in God who has the power to create and recreate. Therefore, “a miracle bids them recognize that nothing is impossible to God and that someday the risen Lord will triumph over evil in its last refuge, namely, sin and death.”⁷²⁷ The tension is not limited to individual minds but also ecclesial communities are equally agitated by the miraculous events. In the words of René Latourelle, “ecclesial communities also undergo crises of faith. When looked at from this vantage point, the contemporary manifestations at Lourdes and Fatima can be seen as urgent calls for

⁷²⁵ Latourelle, 328-9.

⁷²⁶ Latourelle, 329.

⁷²⁷ Latourelle, 330.

conversion that are addressed to the communities of our time, just as the miracles of Jesus were to the towns of Galilee.”⁷²⁸

Miracles are a foretaste of the new kingdom which has started through actions of Jesus and which will come to completion soon. Our struggle with the power of evil one is waning through the incarnation, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ who is the Lord and master of every reality. “Miracles remind us that *he who has come* to destroy the works of Satan is also *he who is coming* to establish humankind and the universe in a definitive order of things. Miracles have their place between the creation of the world and the transformation of all things and all persons in Jesus Christ. They are anticipations of the eschatological order.”⁷²⁹ During Jesus earthly ministry he taught people and prepared them for the coming salvation. Through his mighty works, he taught and called people to faith in God and the coming kingdom. “To confirm his messianic mission and the coming of the kingdom of God, Jesus wrought ‘wonders and signs’ which were directed and closely linked to the call of faith. In relation to the miracle, this call has two forms. Faith precedes the miracle and indeed is a condition for its accomplishment. Faith is also an effect of the miracle, because it engenders faith in the souls of those who are its recipients or witnesses,”⁷³⁰ John Paul II asserts. In other words, faith has two roles to play in the life of a Christian. On the one hand, faith is the total abandonment of our will to the will of God in every situation who responds mysteriously to save us. This kind of trust is necessary for a miracle to take place. On the other hand, miracles strengthen our faith in him who has revealed himself through such marvels beyond all telling.

Furthermore, John Paul II did show the nexus between faith and miracles vividly when he opines “that faith is a human response to the word of divine revelation. The miracle is organically linked with this word of God the revealer. It is a “sign” of his presence and action—a particularly striking sign. All this is a sufficient explanation of the particular link which exists between Christ’s ‘miracles-signs’ and faith, a link so clearly outlined in the Gospels.”⁷³¹ This link is illustrated in the encounter between Jesus and the father of the epileptic son. The man said to Jesus, “‘but if you are able to do anything, have pity on us and help us.’ Jesus said to him, ‘If you are able!—All things can be done for the one who believes.’ Immediately the father of the child cried out, I believe; help my unbelief!”

⁷²⁸ Latourelle, 330.

⁷²⁹ Latourelle, 330.

⁷³⁰ John Paul II, “Miracles Are a Call to Faith,” para. 1.

⁷³¹ John Paul II, para. 2.

(Mark 9:22-24). On the contrary, Jesus could not perform miracles because of the people's lack of faith and so confirm the link between miracles and faith of the people negatively. "And he could do no deed of power there, except that he laid his hands on a few sick people and cured them. And he was amazed at their unbelief," (Mark 6:5-6). Most often in the Gospels after healing Jesus would tell the person go your faith has made well, (cf. Matt. 9:20-2; 15: 21-28; Luke 18:42; Matt. 9:28-29). John Paul II emphasises the duty of faith in our relationship with Christ as Christians. According to him, "the principle of faith is therefore fundamental in the relationship with Christ, both as a condition for obtaining the miracle and as the purpose for which it is performed. This is set out clearly at the end of John's Gospel, where we read, 'Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples that are not written in this book. But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through this belief you may have life in his name'" (Jn 20:30-31).⁷³² Miraculous events can have different meanings for different people at the same time. Miracles are multivalent signs raising different interpretations from people from all indications. The multivalent nature of the sign has a lot to say about faith's freedom of choice. People are not forced by the miraculous events into accepting what they do not want because they are acts of God. God has respect for people's free will. Miracles challenge faith and make it credible.⁷³³ Accordingly, *Dignitatis Humanae*, the Declaration on the Religious Freedom asserts that "He wrought miracles to illuminate His teaching and to establish its truth, but His intention was to rouse faith in His hearers and to confirm them in faith, not to exert coercion upon them."⁷³⁴

Moreover, miracles have helped in entrenching faith through many devotions that came as a result of the messages of visions and apparitions. Michael O'Neill contends that "Miracles have helped foster an increase in devotions as well as the spread and acceptance of specific Marian dogmas (e.g., the Immaculate Conception in the case of Lourdes). Many devotions and devotionals claim supernatural origin by virtue of referencing an originating Marian apparition. The Rosary is legendarily attributed to an apparition to St. Dominic in 1208, and St. Simon Stock is said to have received the first brown scapular from Our Lady in 1251 in Aylesford England."⁷³⁵ However, Avery Dulles says faith that

⁷³² John Paul II, para. 18.

⁷³³ Walter Kasper, *Jesus of Christ*, 83.

⁷³⁴ DH, 11.

⁷³⁵ O'Neill, *Exploring the Miraculous*, 27.

relies on the miracles is weak when compared with the faith that depends on the word of God. Thus he says, “faith is supported by miracles and frequently takes its rise from them. Yet a faith that relies on miracles is only preliminary and inadequate, inferior to faith that relies only on the word of Jesus.”⁷³⁶ Well, seeing may be an opportunity of believing but less when compared with the word. After all, faith is the assurance of the things hoped for.

Nevertheless, there is an on-going debate whether to accept private Revelations with Divine faith or human faith. Many are of the opinion that assent of human faith should be given to such Revelations even when approved by the Church, but this should be done prudently. Finally, Avery Dulles says, “ordinarily speaking, some measure or degree of faith is pre-required on the part of those who ask for miracles. Jesus rebukes those who demand extraordinary signs as a condition for faith in Him, and praises those who believe in simple reliance on His word. Yet He insists also that the signs He works are such as to increase the culpability of those who, having seen His works, still refuse to believe.”⁷³⁷

4.2.5.3. Miracles and Holiness

“The Church constantly associates miracles and holiness, especially in causes of beatification and canonization. Miracles and holiness are signs of the new world begun by Christ, for holiness accomplishes in the human person what miracles accomplish in the cosmos,”⁷³⁸ René Latourelle asserts. The saints were part and parcel of this earthly dwelling before their glorification. Their new state of life reminds the people what future has in stock for those who have accepted in faith the message of salvation Christ preached. “The saints are prophets of the world to come. Their existence bears witness to the new condition of the children of God: they ‘make visible’ to their fellows the future condition to which all are called. It is not surprising, therefore, that miracles should be an almost normal accompaniment of holiness in our world.”⁷³⁹ Miracles wrought through the intercession of the saints reveal to people the condition of those who have died with Lord and now reigning with him in glory. It confirms the benefits of heroic, virtuous life in Christ and its consequential effect. In this case, miracles have the duty of partially pointing at the glory of all the saved. That is to say, “miracles make their appearance

⁷³⁶ Dulles, *The Assurance of Things Hoped For*, 15.

⁷³⁷ Dulles, *A History of Apologetics*, 9.

⁷³⁸ Latourelle, *The Miracles of Jesus and the Theology of Miracles*, 331.

⁷³⁹ Latourelle, 331.

spontaneously as signs of the kindness of Christ to those who are configured to him, as sparks of the active presence of his grace in them, as signs of their participation in the cross and glory of the risen Lord. The universe is being changed and human beings are changed: miracles and holiness represent the new world and the real change now being produced by the efficacious word of salvation.”⁷⁴⁰

The nexus between miracles and holiness is manifested in Christ-event: Passion, death, and resurrection, which crowned our salvation history. Jesus through his actions has transformed the condition of humanity into glory. “Miracles are thus the visible traces of the profound change that in Jesus Christ affects the entire human person and the universe in which it dwells. Through his Spirit the risen Christ *gives life* to all flesh and *sanctifies* it. Miracles and holiness are the rays of his glory, that is, of his divine being through the mediation of his human body.”⁷⁴¹ Similarly, in the words of Mary Valentine, “the church holds that if a saint is a perfect witness of the kingdom of Christ, and hence the perfect imitator of the Lord, closely united to him, then the miracle which occurs through his intercession is not only a confirmation of the existence of the kingdom, but also an incontestable proof of the sanctity of the person invoked, and also a proof that sanctity is generally possible rather than a chimera.”⁷⁴² The most important thing we cannot fail to apprehend is the sign of the future kingdom being revealed in and through miraculous events. Many founders of religious orders received their inspiration through the message of visions or apparitions to pursue a specific life of holiness in accord with the message they have received like, Servites, Passionists, the Sisters of the Rosary, and Opus Dei.

4.2.5.4. Miracles and Trinitarian Life

As already mentioned in chapter one, miracles are signs of the love of God, and in miracles, people participate in this love existing in the triune God, the Father, the Son and Holy Spirit. Miracles are the works of the Father who has given all authority to the Son and at the same time the work of the Son, as well as the work of the Holy Spirit who proceeds from the Father and the Son. In fact, miracles are the Revelation of God’s love to the people. René Latourelle reiterates that “miracles are works that involve the entire Trinity: Father, Son, and Spirit, and that tend to make ever more intimate the uninterrupted dialogue of the Father with his children whom Christ has redeemed. As

⁷⁴⁰ Latourelle, 331.

⁷⁴¹ Latourelle, 332.

⁷⁴² Valentine, *Miracles*, 101-2.

signs of the great presence of God among human beings, miracles give a deeper and broader understanding of that presence, even more today than in the time of Jesus.”⁷⁴³ After the ascension, Christ did not leave his Church as an orphan but sent the Holy Spirit to guide and direct her always. Miracles serve as an aid leading people to participate in the love and glory existing in the Trinity. Indeed, miracles reinforce people’s faith in God through the actions of Christ and Holy Spirit in their midst.

4.3. Summary

This chapter has considered with an open mind the issue of miracles with the aim of ascertaining correct miraculous actions and their functions in the contemporary period and not to stifle the Spirit. The motive is the urgent need for the people to be guided in their quest to know God and worship him and not to be led astray by some mischievous people using miracles as their tool. Hence, this chapter looked deeply at the procedures for recognising miracles in line with the teaching of the Church and tradition. In the words of Fredrick Jelly, “we cannot build our faith on the sand of alleged apparitions and private revelations, regardless of how well intentioned the individuals involved might be. If we believe that our salvation depends on what is found in private revelation, or if we place-with vain credulity or naivete-our confidence in private revelations, we are mistaken and are not building our faith on a solid foundation, namely, the Word of God, Scripture, tradition, and the teaching of the Church.”⁷⁴⁴

Two methods of recognising miracles were discussed, spontaneous and theological recognitions. The former is intuitive while the latter is systematic. On the one hand, spontaneous recognition is the recognition elicited when individuals are suddenly confronted with a miracle. On the other hand, theological recognition makes use of the data generated from spontaneous recognition in analysing miraculous events systematically. They dissect and analyse each phase of the observed phenomenon looking for a link that connects the wonder as a sign from God. Theologians through this analysis will be able to discover the purpose of miracles. With the discernment of private Revelations, their purpose is put in proper perspective. The research observed that the theological recognition was the methodology applied by the Congregation for the Causes of Saints in certifying a proposed miracle in the process of beatification and canonization.

⁷⁴³ Latourelle, *The Miracles of Jesus and the Theology of Miracles*, 333.

⁷⁴⁴ Jelly, “Discerning the Miraculous,” 54.

Be that as it may, any true recognition of miracles must consider the factual and signified aspects as represented by spontaneous and theological recognitions respectively.

The process of recognition involves careful discernment, focusing on the integrity of the visionary and the content of messages. The Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith has laid down some norms to help the local bishops whose duty it is to begin this process. First and for most, for anything to be considered as a miracle, it must take place in a religious context. Some positive characteristics such as moral certitude, and personal qualities of the subject, Revelation with true theological and spiritual doctrine were given as authentic signs. On the other hand, any alleged miraculous event that would manifest profit or financial gain strictly connected to it and psychological disorder or psychopathic tendencies in the subject is considered doubtful.

As have stated, the domain of miracles remains that of religion and not science. As a result of the Church's disposition towards medical science, they employed such in the procedure for the canonization. Even though science and scientific knowledge would help in clarifying and verifying the authenticity of miracles they do not have the last say in this matter. The judgements of apparitions and private Revelations by the Church are based on the positive and negative criteria given by the Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith. Normally, one of the three traditional pronouncements, not 'worthy of belief,' not 'approved,' and 'nothing contrary to the faith,' would be the case depending on the outcome of the investigation. The task of discerning private Revelations is not an easy job at all even with the guidelines in place. The extraordinary realities are more complicated than one can imagine.

Finally, the functions of miracles were expatiated and analysed with the intention of knowing their imports for Christian living. Miracles have the duty of communicating the glory of God and calling people to salvation. Moreover, miracles have the function of revealing the power, mercy, the coming kingdom and love of God to the people. Equally, they authenticate the message and messengers of God before the world. The functions of miracles are not limited to Revelation and accreditation but also to liberate human beings and bring them to fulfilment. They serve as an invitation to Christian living which entails conversion, faith and holiness of life. It is clear that miracles do not coerce faith instead challenge people to make a decision about their faith. Nevertheless, miracles are not a necessity for faith instead, an aid to it.

CONCLUSION

The research began by noting that miracles are fundamental to Catholic faith despite criticisms and influence of the age of the reason. It is fundamental because Catholic faith has its foundation in the miracle of all miracles, resurrection. The study is on the contemporary Catholic theology of miracles from Second Vatican Council upwards. During this period, it was discovered that there are revival and a new understanding of miracles as signs. In other words, miracles are studied from the perspective of signs more than ontological or psychological aspect. These signs are symbolic with a capacity of transforming people's value and changing them for better. Moreover, the meaning of miracles in the contemporary era depends on the person of Christ and his works.

From the biblical notion of miracles, the research established that miracles are signs and means of Divine Revelation through which God manifests his Divine plans to humanity. Catholic Church teaches that Christ perfected Revelation through his words and mighty signs. Hence, miracles are means of God's self-communication of his Divine purpose and wills to the humanity. In fact, miracles are signs pointing beyond the events to the purpose of the mighty deeds. Second Vatican Council's teaching on the Divine Revelation is the watershed on the understanding of miracles in the contemporary Catholic theology. The contemporary theological definitions underscore the semiological dimension of miracles. As symbolic signs, they are evocative and multivalent manifesting signs of God's power, love, faith, Divine mission, the glory of Christ, and the coming kingdom of God. These symbolic signs continue in the Church with the believers as Christ promised.

Detail consideration of private Revelations brought out their importance as an aid to faith. Hence, all authentic Eucharistic miracles, different claims of apparitions, miracles of the saints, miraculous images, locutions, and stigmata serve as a boost to faith. The content and messages of private Revelations are not new Revelations. The subjective nature of private Revelations introduced some controversial ideas in the content of the message. Equally, the implementation of Second Vatican Council's decision on the right of mass media to information made it possible for people to publish news about private Revelations both censored or uncensored. Consequent upon these facts, post-biblical miracles have somehow divided the faithful along the line of those who believed and those who do not. It is a serious source of concern to theologians and the Church's hierarchy in this contemporary age. The wrong attitude towards private Revelations has manifested in some superstitious beliefs and practices by the faithful.

However, the Church has written some documents explaining the proper understanding and purpose of post-biblical miracles. With a proper investigation and discernment of different private Revelations, one would appreciate these realities, which serve as an aid to faith. The research tried to balance the issues of credulity and scepticism noticed among the people as a result of the private Revelations.

The criticisms levelled against the possibility and credibility was addressed first, by maintaining the proper context of miraculous which is theological and second historical. That is to say, miracles are religious subject and not scientific or philosophical. The research discovered that they do not have jurisdiction over the subject matter and secondly, that their method of dismissing the possibility of miracles a priori is against their principle of verifying everything before accepting or rejecting it. A situation whereby any person or group would dismiss any idea a priori is unacceptable in the field of learning. The notion that belief tilts towards greater evidence and does not wait up until every fact is proved hundred percent guided the arguments in favour of the possibility of miracles. Otherwise, that would mean living in the utopian world of ideas which is contrary to the reality on the ground. Instead, what people do is to evaluate the evidence before them and decide what to accept or reject. In other words, people follow the more credible and rational option in their decisions always. Miracles are incredible if one does not believe in the existence of God who creates and sustain the world on a daily basis.

Moreover, the urgent need for the people to be guided in their quest to know God and worship him through Revelations warranted discernment of miracles and their functions. The research identified two methods of recognition of miracles, spontaneous and theological recognitions. The former is intuitive while the latter is systematic. Theological recognition makes use of the data generated from spontaneous recognition in analysing miraculous events. Theologians through this analysis were able to discover the purpose of miracles as leading to faith and salvation. The factual and signified aspects of miracles as represented by spontaneous and theological recognitions respectively are essential in the process of discernment and recognition. The Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith has laid down some norms to help those whose duty it is to begin this process.

Even though science and scientific knowledge would help in clarifying and verifying the authenticity of miracles, the research discovered that they do not have the last say in this matter. It is clear that the task of discerning private Revelations is not an easy job at all

even with the guidelines in place. The extraordinary realities are more complicated than one can imagine especially in this contemporary period.

Furthermore, the research realised that miracles have the duty of communicating the glory of God and calling people to salvation. Moreover, miracles have the function of revealing the power, mercy, the coming kingdom and love of God to the people as well as to authenticate the message and messengers of God before the world. It was clear from the study that miracles do not coerce faith instead challenge people to take a decision about their faith. Such is the condition of the contemporary Catholic theology of miracles in this era and their on-going discourse.

The research has been able to present the contemporary Catholic theological understanding of miracles as signs with some purposes to accomplish in the life of every Christian. Equally, it has created awareness of miracles and their functions in this period where many thought that science has taken over people's mind and activity. The alleged threat to miracles from science and contemporary mindset turns out to be less worrisome when appropriately analysed in the context of prayers and faith in God. Despite all the criticisms levelled against miracles as signs and means of God's manifestation, there are good reasons to accept the possibility and credibility of miracles.

Finally, although the Church through her theologians has made efforts in setting out the correct understanding of miracles and their functions, there is a need for a theological solution to the "traditional Catholic low pace" approach to investigation, discernment and recognition of private Revelations. Secondly, the positive and negative effects of the improved information and communication technologies on the dissemination of the news of private Revelations needs to be elucidated. These would help in minimaxing the impact of some fake miracles in this contemporary period which is somehow accustomed to immediate and swift action.

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