

ARE CHRISTIANS TO PERFORM MIRACLES IN THIS AGE?

That the world today is in danger of miracle-mongers who claim to be prophets of God is a fact which no one can gainsay. At street corners, crusades night vigils, and at various revival assemblies, members of the public are daily accosted with giant posters and proclamations persuading them to come for deliverance from afflictions, barrenness, joblessness, poverty, business failure, yokes and burdens and so on.

An advert for a crusade ran thus: "The doors of heaven will (be) opened...the sick will be healed, broken marriages will come together again and thieves will bring back things they have stolen " ! – *National Post* February 23, 2001, page 2.

So great is the obsession with miracles that churches are now competing with one another in laying claims to miracle-cures to prevent their members from flooding to so-called "living" churches. In Britain members of the Anglican Church have openly confessed that they are desperately seeking for miracles to keep their adherents within their fold. A story with the headline "Churches in Britain Starved of Miracles" carried in *The Guardian on Sunday* of June 18, 2000 at page 23 reported that "Christendom in Britain has expressed worry on the shortage of miracles there these days..." Quoting a 400-page report entitled "*A Time to Heal*", which spoke of the popularity of Christian healing centres such as Lourdes and Walsingham, the newspaper report disclosed that most parishes held regular services with "laying on of hands" and "prayers for healing" and that each of the 43 dioceses in Britain had its own adviser on healing and deliverance with ordained clergymen or women occasionally called to carry out exorcisms. It was the same misconceived idea that religious leaders can do miracles today that informed the Pope's attempt to cast out a demon from a girl by sheer command as reported in the London *Daily Telegraph* website of April 2000. The Pope's inability to cast out the demon which incident occurred during a general audience in a packed St Peter's Square, was reported in an Italian newspaper the *Il Messaggero* in a story headlined: "Devil defeats the Pope in Vatican exorcism battle". According to the story, reported by Bruce Johnston in Rome, "Despite the Pope's efforts and those of his chief 'Satan-buster', Fr Gabriele Amorth," to carry out what was called an 'impromptu exorcism' on an unnamed 19-year-old girl from Monza "the girl remained 'possessed' by the devil."

There is no doubt that those seeking miracles from men, whether in Britain or elsewhere are in ignorance of the purpose of God. Instead of doing works of righteousness so that God may have mercy on them, they are looking for miracles. Space constraints will not permit us to dilate on the degeneration in spiritual life of people in Europe such that many Church buildings now serve as tourist attractions while many have been converted to libraries, museums schools, and even pubs (drinking houses). The appalling situation made the Archbishop of Canterbury, Lord Carey to lament that the Church in Britain is "now one generation away from extinction." (*Newsweek* July 12, 1999, page 48) Jesus Christ told the scribes and Pharisees when they requested for signs: "An evil and adulterous generation seeketh after a sign and there shall no sign be given to it but the sign of the prophet Jonah..." (Matthew 12: 38-40)

Stage-managed miracles are rife in Nigeria. This is because the people's quest for miracles (rather than the truth) is so intense. When a German evangelist, Reverend Reinhard Bonnke, went to Calabar for a crusade it was reported that patients deserted hospitals for the crusade grounds in the hope of receiving healing. (vide *The Guardian* January 27, 2000 page 1) There is no record of any of them being healed. When no fewer than 14 persons died following a stampede at his crusade ground in Benin City, the so-called miracle worker could not bring any of

them back to life as St. Paul did in the case of Eutychus (Acts 20: 7-12) One of the victim's family instituted a N60 million suit against the German Evangelist and his colleagues who insisted that the human traffic accident did not occur at their crusade grounds as was inferred but occurred while the people affected were going home. (*Vanguard* October 12, 1999, pages 1,2)

False Prophets

Those who go about advertizing in showbusiness style their prowess in making miracles always cite the promise of Jesus Christ to his disciples: "And these signs shall follow them that believe; In my name shall they cast out devils; they shall speak with new tongues; they shall take up serpents; and if they drink any deadly thing, it shall not hurt them; they shall lay hands on the sick, and they shall recover.' (Mark 16: 17) But the truth which cannot be wished away is that these signs promised by the Lord Jesus Christ had fulfilled. This is evident in verse 20: "And they went forth, and preached every where, the Lord working with them, and confirming the word with signs following. Amen." (See also Hebrews 2: 2-4) The miracles were done to establish the Church which was then in its infancy, after which the gift ceased. The miracles done by Jesus Christ and later his apostles foreshadowed what God will do in far greater measure in His kingdom fully established, when people will not have disabilities of any sort. – Isaiah 13: 12; 1 Corinthians 15: 37,38,42,43

Another text which miracle workers frequently cite to support their claims is John 14:12-14 in which Jesus Christ told his disciples to wit: "Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that believeth on me, the works that I do shall he do also; and greater works than these shall he do; because I go unto my Father. And whatsoever ye shall ask in my name, that will I do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If ye shall ask any thing in my name, I will do it" Jesus Christ was not talking about miracles in that text as even a cursory reading of the Synoptic gospels and the Acts would show that the disciples of Christ never did greater miracles that he did. The primary mission of Jesus Christ was to preach the gospel (Luke 4:43) And for the three and half years of his ministry, he concentrated primarily on the Jews. (Matthew 10: 5; 15: 26,27) What Jesus Christ meant was that his disciples would cover far more ground, reach many more nations and do the work of dispensing the gospel for a far longer period than he did. – Luke 24:45-47; Acts 1:8 God knowing that the devil mimics every aspect of His work, has made it clear in the scriptures that the test or proof of true discipleship in these last days will not be the performance of miracles but the ability to interpret the scriptures and dispense the truth which if people believe and practice, will lead them to salvation.- 1 John 2: 27; John 8: 31,32; 1 Timothy 2: 3,4; etc

Lying Wonders

That people could falsely claim to be sent by God or Jesus Christ should not come as a surprise to anyone. Jesus Christ warned: "Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven." (Matthew 7: 21) He further stated: "Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity." (Matthew 7: 22,23. See also Revelation 13: 11-14; 19: 20) It was for this reason Jesus Christ

warned Christians to beware of false prophets whose stock-in-trade is the making of miracles. He declared: "And many false prophets shall rise, and shall deceive many. For there shall arise false Christs, and false prophets, and shall shew great signs and wonders; insomuch that, if it were possible, they shall deceive the very elect." – Matthew 24:11,24

St. Paul, knowing the tendency of the Devil and his agents to sail under false colours, claiming to belong to Christ, warned Christians against "false apostles, deceitful workers" who transform "themselves into the apostles of Christ." He added: "And no marvel; for Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light. Therefore it is no great thing if his ministers also be transformed as the ministers of righteousness; whose end shall be according to their works." – 2 Corinthians 11: 13-15

Furthermore, St. John was used by God to expose the loud, noisy (but empty) character of these false prophets to wit: "And I saw three unclean spirits like frogs come out of the mouth of the dragon, and out of the mouth of the beast, and out of the mouth of the false prophet. For they are the spirits of devils, working miracles, which go forth unto the kings of the earth and of the whole world, to gather them to the battle of that great day of God Almighty." (Revelation 16: 13-14) The three unclean "spirits of devils" came out of the mouth of the dragon, thus showing their true character. (Matthew 12: 34) The devil makes much noise, is boastful and arrogant. He is the very fountain head of boasting and lies. His agents also mouth great swelling words and make boastful claims. They relate and compromise with the political and commercial giants of the world, using miracles as tools. Ultimately, God will destroy the devil, miracle workers and their associates. (Matthew 15:12-14; Isaiah 9:16; 2 Corinthians 4:3,4) St. Paul also stated that Satan will use his agents to intensify the doing of signs and wonders in these last days as it is written, "And then shall that Wicked be revealed, whom the Lord shall consume with the spirit of his mouth, and shall destroy with the brightness of his coming: Even him, whose coming is after the working of Satan with all power and signs and lying wonders, And with all deceivableness of unrighteousness in them that perish; because they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved. And for this cause God shall send them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie: That they all might be damned who believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness." (2 Thessalonians 2: 8-12) Look around and you will find that bombast, noise-making and the penchant for fantastic claims are at the very heart of the so-called healing-ministries in Nigeria and different parts of the world. What should be understood therefore is that Satan's agents can do miracles, but they can never preach the truth. It is the truth that men of goodwill should strive for, not miracles. (John 8: 44; 1 Timothy 6: 5; 1 Timothy 2: 3,4; John 8: 31,32)

True healing

It must be made clear that God, having enthroned His Son Jesus Christ in heaven at this end of the world, is healing His people Himself, in fulfilment of His promise and not through human agents any longer. This is manifest in the declaration through the prophet Malachi: "But unto you that fear my name shall the Sun of righteousness arise with healing in his wings; and ye shall go forth, and grow up as calves of the stall." (Malachi 4:2) God further promised that in this Kingdom age He will bring unto his people "health and cure" and reveal unto them the abundance of peace and truth." (Jeremiah 33:6 See also Isaiah 35: 1-10)) While the sick and afflicted in the Church can go to the elders of the true Church for prayers, which God will answer in His time. (James 5: 13-15) credit should not be given to any man as having any special power to heal or do miracles. It is deceit of the first order for any one to claim he has special power to

do miracles and thus invite people to come to him for cures. Such people, by their actions, make the way of truth to be evil spoken of. They are not sent by God. -Isaiah 52:5; Romans 2: 24; 2 Peter 2: 1-4; 2 Corinthians 2: 17 .

It must be emphasized that it is not every ailment among the people of God that will be cured now. That would only be in God's kingdom. (Isaiah 33: 24) A ready instance is that of St. Paul who three times prayed God to heal him of his sickness but God told him: "My grace is sufficient for thee..." - 2 Corinthians 12: 9

From the foregoing it is evident that the miracles which present day pastors and evangelists are proclaiming do not come from Christ. Such miracle workers are only advertising themselves to be the agents of the devil as prophesied in the Holy Bible. It is the truth preached in God's holy organisation, of which God's Kingdom Society is a part and parcel, that will lead to salvation in God's Kingdom where there will be no more sickness, disability or deformity of any sort. – Isaiah 33: 24; 13:12; 1 Corinthians 15: 35-38, 42,43.