

## EDITORIAL

The unprecedented rate at which Pentecostalism has grown under our watch has called for concerns among several individuals. There is no gain saying that the influence of Pentecostalism is getting stronger in the Nigerian Church. The flourishing of churches in every nook and cranny of our country is an obvious attestation to the growth of Pentecostal churches, which indisputably, the bulk of them fall into.<sup>1</sup> This rise to fame has been attributed to the rising economic meltdown in the country. As a result of this upsurge, the 43<sup>rd</sup> edition of the Bigard Theological Studies has undertaken the theme **Pentecostalism** with the aim of finding ways of gathering back all the Lord's faithful, so that there will be one flock, one shepherd (Jn. 10:16).

Pentecostalism is a renewal movement in the Christian churches which emphasizes personal encounter with God in Jesus Christ through the baptism of the Holy Spirit. By way of definition, it refers to the Protestant Christian denominations which emphasize salvation by faith in the atoning death of Jesus Christ through personal conversion and the authority of Scripture in matters of faith and Christian practice, and a stress on the signs of the Spirit's radical transforming power.<sup>2</sup> Pentecostalism is a form of a charismatic movement that practically permeates all strata of Christendom today from established churches to new ones that spring up on a daily basis. It has become an existent reality that has intentionally or unintentionally led many unsuspecting Christians to damnation rather than salvation.

Already stated above is the terrific rate at which Pentecostalism spreads which has raised doubts and concerns about its authenticity.

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<sup>1</sup> V. Darlington, *Pentecostalism in the New Testament and Its Impact in the Nigerian Church*, In "Pentecostalism: Proceedings of the National Seminaries Committee Workshop, Jos, 2004", Charles Hammawa (ed.), (Jos: Fab Anieh Nig. Ltd., 2005), p. 67.

<sup>2</sup> W. Ihejirika, *From Catholicism to Pentecostalism*, (Enugu: Snaap Press Ltd., 2006), p. 2.

The worship of Pentecostalism tends to build on the emotions of the audience in such a way that one is left totally captivated. There is great emphasis on miracles and the use of spiritual gifts, especially prayers for healing and financial upliftment. This fact is also part of the reason while Pentecostalism is thriving. In addition is the constant fear and ignorance of what tomorrow holds. This ignorance plays another major role as to why gullible Christians are always victims (cf Hos. 4:6).

Notwithstanding the negative effects of Pentecostalism such as requiring all 'born-again' Christians to speak in tongues, denial of Tradition as a source of Christian faith and praxis, obsession with the gift of seeing the presence of evil or the evil one etc., one cannot deny the fact that Pentecostalism has its advantages, one of which is making Christians more at home with the scriptures. Nonetheless, the negative effects outweigh its positive effects. Moreover, the extreme nature of Pentecostalism promotes the literal understanding of the words of the scripture such that it is quoted out of context in several occasions. As such, many individuals only expect to see signs and wonders before they acknowledge the presence of God. God does indeed work miracles; that is, he intervenes in human affairs in dramatic ways. But he cannot be programmed to intervene at our bidding. People cannot make God work a miracle.<sup>3</sup> Some Pentecostals go far as to say that suffering is not their portion. For them, if a person is not healed visibly of an ailment, that person has not been healed. Such a person is either an incurable sinner or his or her faith is not good enough to elicit healing.<sup>4</sup> These set of persons with this mindset need to be taught that suffering and sickness are also part and parcel of the Christian life and this is among the major tasks the edition of this journal has set out to tackle.

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<sup>3</sup> Msgr. J. Aniagwu, *The Challenge of Pentecostalism*, In "Pentecostalism: Proceedings of the National Seminaries Committee Workshop, Jos, 2004", Charles Hammawa (ed.), (Jos: Fab Anieh Nig. Ltd., 2005), p. 22.

<sup>4</sup>Msgr. J. Aniagwu, *The Challenge of Pentecostalism*, p. 22.

In his article titled **Pentecostalization: A Threat to Christianization**, Fr. Kelvin Asogwa argues that the rise in the number of Pentecostal churches and communities stem from the fact that most Christians are no longer satisfied with what they receive from the Catholic faith and practices and again, some priests no longer find satisfaction in the orthodox Catholic practices and as a result of their Pentecostal style of life, lead the faithful away from Christ. Eventually, the Pentecostal pastors turn around to promise the faithful a safe haven and a quick means of accessing it. To combat this threat, Fr. Kelvin posits several possible means of bringing back the people of God. The onus thus lies on every true Christian to remain steadfast to the authentic teachings of Christ and the Church as this will rekindle the flame and joy of being numbered as a member of Christ's faithful.

Drawing insights from relevant ecclesiastical documents and the scriptures, Fr. Albert Ikpenwa in his colloquium paper **Seminary Formation: A Period for Authentic Catechesis and Witnessing** for the **2022/2023 Academic and Formation** year of Bigard Memorial Seminary, Enugu makes a critical conspectus of catechesis within the seminary milieu. He uncovers the importance of catechetical pedagogy in the formation of a priest. However, etched in the pages of this work are also, information on the nature of catechesis, the need for authentic catechesis, the thematic areas covered by authentic catechesis, the identity of the agents of catechesis and the need for their formation. More importantly, the virtues necessary for authentic catechesis and witnessing are outlined and succinctly discussed in this article.

Proper internalization and careful absorption of the seminary formation can be an added advantage to a priest in his area of evangelization. This is the driving force of Fr. Benjamin Ezulike's **Inaugural Lecture for 2022/2023 Academic and Formation Year** of Bigard Memorial Seminary, Enugu on the theme: **Disconnect Between Seminary Formation and the Priestly Life and**

**Ministry: The Missing Link.** He explains how best seminarians undergoing training to become priests can appropriate the training and formation they received in the seminary and make proper use of it as tools for successful evangelization. The main objective of this article is to bridge the disconnect that lies between the period of one's training and formation in the seminary and the period of one's apostolate as a priest. Moreover, for an effective training and formation, it is pertinent that the candidate internalizes all the training he receives and applies it in his ministry as a pastoral agent.

Fr. Humphrey Uchenna Ani in his article **Pentecostalism and Its Impact on the Catholic Church** posits that Pentecostalism which has its roots in the protestant reformation has come to stay especially amongst the mainstream churches like the Catholic Church. The article also reviews the impact Pentecostalism has on the Catholic Church. This impact has caused a widening gap in the orthodoxy and practice of the Christian faith among Catholics. Furthermore, the article also brings out the distinctive features and *modus operandi* that distinguishes this religious group from other religious groups.

The Pentecostals' ideology of suffering as an effect of lack of good Christian charity on the part of individual Christians is refuted in the article by Fr. Joseph Monday Orji titled: **Jesus, the Crucified Messiah and the Implication of Pentecostal Denial of Suffering.** This article traces suffering from the history of the life of Jesus while explaining Jesus as the suffering Messiah. This concept of suffering thus, does not agree with the tenets of Pentecostal ideology because they see suffering as a means of punishment meted on individuals as result for their inadequacies and lack of faith. However, the demand of Jesus is for every Christian to take up the cross and follow Him. This implies that suffering should be seen as part of the human experience and not just a repercussion from God for not being a faithful believer.

Conclusively, the position of suffering as a curse or blessing in the lives of Christians forms the take-off point in the article of Fr. Donatus Oluwa Chukwu titled: **Suffering in the Life of Christians: A Blessing or Curse?** The article highlights several pointers to the fact that both just people and unjust people suffer and thus, the reality of suffering is undeniable. Again, since Christ redeemed us through suffering, it should be seen not as a curse but as a blessing and also a means of attaining grace and salvation.

The assurance of salvation is, perhaps, the most enticing tenet of Pentecostalism, particularly for people steeped, justly, in the guilt of their former lives, for they are told that there is no need for a true reformation of character. Being ‘born-again’ can be easy and in that sense, it seems to be a relief. Once one accepts Christ as one’s personal Lord and Saviour, the past may not necessarily cease to exist, but it does not matter at all.<sup>5</sup> Pentecostalism has everything to do with evangelization and should, as a matter of interest, concern those who are involved in evangelization and more importantly, those responsible for training future evangelizers. Thus, the church everywhere and at all times, must of necessity constantly seek to find ways and means of making the gospel message more relevant and reliable.



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<sup>5</sup> Cf. D. Oyesola, *Fundamentalism and the Catholic Faith in Nigerian Higher Institutions*, (Iperu-Remo, Ambassador Publications, 1994), p. 7.