

## EDITORIAL PREFACE

### EVOLVING A MEANINGFUL APPROACH TO EVANGELIZATION IN THE CONTEMPORARY WORLD

The Church is both a spiritual and visible reality. As a visible reality, it exists within society and interacts with it. Thus, it cannot claim to be inured from the different predicaments that confront the human family and as it were, challenge the very essence of the faith it professes. *Gaudium et Spes*, the Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World captures this idea aptly when it remarks: "the joy and hope, the grief and anguish of the men of our time, especially of the poor or afflicted in any way, are the joy and hope, the grief and anguish of the followers of Christ as well" (G. S. 1). Though the primary task of the Church lies in the proclamation of the kerygma, it is not to carry out this responsibility indifferently. Consequently, *Gaudium et Spes* further remarks: "at all times the Church carries the responsibility of reading the signs of the times and of interpreting them in the light of the Gospel, if it is to carry out its task... we must be aware of and understand the aspirations, the yearnings, and the often dramatic features of the world in which we live" (G. S. 4). In other words, the Church must take into cognizance the vicissitudes that characterize our today's world in all its ramifications. Corroborating this fact, St. Pope John Paul II in his encyclical *Centesimus Annus* avers that it is essentially needful for Pastors "to give careful consideration to the current events in order to discern the new requirements of evangelization" (C. A. 3). The charge of these declarations is simple: as a Church, we are called to share in the burdens, thrills and challenges of the world in which live. This is not a simple task.

Obviously, there are myriads of problems confronting humanity in our age and these pose a challenge to evangelization. The Church must necessarily respond to these with renewed vigour and in fidelity to her divine mandate. Few of these challenges bothering on social justice, violence, clerical integrity and family life have been singled out for greater consideration.

Humanity is created in the image and likeness of God and as such possess has a dignity that derives from the transcendent and ultimate reality. This is also the basis for the equality of all persons. In this light then injustice meted out to humanity in whatever form and in whatever measure is an infringement on the dignity of the human person who is the image of God. Therefore, the Church must be at the fore as harbingers of the radical equality of persons and recognize

that it is her bounden duty to preach and stand by this value so that humanity would be built to greater heights.

The increased violence that stares us in the face is another starkly ugly reality that humanity has got to contend with; one which the Church cannot approach with cold feet. The widespread culture of violence and the daily increasing threats to life across climes for which the world bleeds and burns is a threat to human dignity. Violence challenges the Church to live out the primary obligation of her faith, that is, the defense of human dignity. Indeed this is the outright assertion of the Vatican II Council when it expressed unequivocally that "...all offences against itself such as murder, genocide, abortion, euthanasia and willful suicide; all violations of the integrity of the human person...militate against the honour of the creator" (G.S. 27).

In his Apostolic Exhortation- *Pastores Dabo Vobis*, John Paul II argues for the importance of the priesthood to the Church and the world and of its dignity. In this connection he asserts: "Priests are called to prolong the presence of Christ, the one High Priest, embodying his way of life and making Him visible in the midst of the flock entrusted to their care (*Pastores Dabo Vobis*, 15). If this is really what the priest is and should be, it is then obvious that the present realities that confront us about the lives and conducts of priests leave much to be desired. As such, we cannot pay deaf ears to situations that attest to a compromise of integrity on the part of clerics.

Closely connected to the above is the noble institution of the family which has continued to spark up undying controversies. Marriage is an institution ordained by God for the perpetuation of the human race. Hence, the fathers of the Second Vatican Council expressly state that "the creator of all made the married state the beginning and foundation of human society" (*Apostolicam Actuositatem*, 11). Therefore, marriage and family life constitute the basic nucleus of humanity. It is an "intimate partnership of life and love" (G. S. 48). These positions go a long way to make us affirm that marriage is a noble vocation. However, despite its nobility, we can all attest to the fact that there are forces that blow against marriage and family life. These have made the Church alert and put her on her toes to greater vigilance and pastoral solicitude for her children.

The world constantly presents us with opportunities and challenges which are peculiar to every age. Some of the issues that characterize our age really shake

our moral pillars; they attack our social fiber and make our cultural roots risk being dried up. The gospel is meaningful and succeeds to the extent that it addresses this context firmly. The challenges that are popped-up in this dawn require a deeper reflection that makes it imperative for the Church to become more reflective so as to devise new and better ways of responding to these challenges by adopting more fruitful missionary models without altering the fundament of the Gospel message. It is against this backdrop that the theme **THE CHURCH TODAY: SOME ISSUES AT STAKE** was chosen. It is a renewed charge and challenge just as that of Pope John XXIII during his opening address to the fathers of the Second Vatican Council. The Council fathers were asked, in the spirit of *aggiornamento*, updating, to seek meaningful, positive and fresh ways of restating the age-old doctrine of the Church; to make them relevant to the modern world; to approach issues pastorally rather than engage in sterile and lofty high-tensioned academic controversies. Articles published here revolve around the Church in her essence and on the multi-faceted challenges that she must respond to according to the "signs of the time". Articles that make this journal are contributed by various Catholic theological Seminaries and Institutes in Nigeria and are largely referenced according to the style adopted by their institutes.

**Anthony C. Akpan, C.S.Sp.**  
**Editor**