



A Communiqué Issued by the Catholic Biblical Association of Nigeria (CABAN) at the End of Its 13th Annual Conference Held through Zoom Cloud, 3rd - 5th November 2020

Preamble

We, the members of the Catholic Biblical Association of Nigeria (CABAN), held our Thirteenth Annual Conference through *Zoom Cloud Meetings* from 3rd to 5th November 2020, with a good number of members and others participating from Nigeria and beyond. This conference mode was in response to the global lockdown and restrictions in movements and large gatherings caused by the outbreak and widespread of COVID 19, and exacerbated by “The EndSARS” protests in Nigeria. The theme, **The Bible on Human Beings, Race and Land**, addressed the connection between human beings, race and land in the Bible, issues currently heightened by mass migrations and internal displacements of peoples (IDPs) and land grabbing. Having studied and reflected exegetically, hermeneutically and prayerfully on this theme in select biblical texts we issue this Communiqué.

1. Human Beings. Human beings (*adam*) are created “male and female”, “in God’s image and likeness” (Gen 1:26-27; 5:1-2; 9:6). Though formed “from the dust of the ground” (*adamah*), they are living beings through “the breath of life” God gives them (cf. Gen 2:7); and they are the only creatures that have the singular privilege of entering into dialogue with the Creator. Furthermore, at the incarnation, God-Word, assumed human nature: “the Word became flesh and dwelt among us” (John 1:14). Thus, human life is sacred; it belongs to God. Every human person has inalienable value and rights (Matt 6:26; Luke 12:24) which must be respected. Their intrinsic dignity stems from their creation in God’s image and likeness; and because God in the person of Jesus of Nazareth shared their nature. Humans are therefore not mere objects of degrading research or inhuman treatment (Matt 7:12; Luke 6:31). All forms of manipulation of human life from conception to death are against the will of the Creator to whom human life is precious.

2. Race. The Bible declares that all human beings are of one and the same race (Gen 2:7; Acts 17:26). Differences in colour, language and culture are of the Creator’s doing (Gen 11:1-11). Therefore, no nation has or should claim superiority over another on account of these differences, for every culture has its own values. Most African cultures, for instance, are hospitable and welcoming to strangers. The problem arises when new settlers forcefully or subtly claim racial superiority and ownership of the land against their original inhabitants. This problem can be avoided if new comers eschew their hidden agenda to claim hegemony and false racial superiority over the indigenous peoples. We see this being sadly played out in most parts of Nigeria, Africa and other parts of the world. On the authority of Scripture, such subversive agenda must be rejected outright.

3. Land. The land/earth “belongs to God” (Exod 19:5; Deut 10:14; Ps 24:1-2); who gives it to human beings for their use. In the Genesis creation accounts, God entrusted the land, which God “caused to appear” from the waters (Gen 1:9) to humankind “to till it and keep it” (Gen 2:15; cf. 1:28). The land is for the benefit of all earth’s creatures; humans created in God’s image and likeness have the mandate to take care of it as their “common home” and the home of other earth’s creatures (cf. Pope Francis, *Laudato Si’*). Unfortunately, most of the conflicts in our contemporary societies are land-related. The land itself has been grossly exploited and abused;

humans have died, been maimed and dispossessed of their heritage. The biblical story of Naboth's vineyard (1 Kgs 21:1-24) reminds us that every land has a history of inheritance of the people dwelling on it; this heritage must be respected. Human beings suffer when their history is neglected, suppressed and denigrated. Those who commit such offences do so in defiance of the Creator and provoke God's anger on themselves and their family (1 Kgs 21:19-24).

4. Earth's Resources and Human Life. To cater for humanity, God blessed the land with every kind of living creature: "cattle, creeping things, and wild animals of all kinds" (Gen 1:4). The resources in Mother Earth are for the progress and welfare of every human being. Today, the same resources with which God has blessed the land have generated all kinds of conflict. The ongoing killings in Nigeria, for example, are connected with the rich land resources God has bestowed on its citizens. Destruction of the life of any human being for whatever reason is a crime; it is against the will of the Creator and the clear message of the Bible (cf. Exod 20:13; Deut 5:17; Sir 17:1). We are all brothers and sisters. No one has the right to end the life of another human being or ethnic group in order to usurp their land resources.

5. Responsible Leadership. Every authority comes from God (Sir 17:17) and is for a good purpose (Heb 13:17). Leaders have the responsibility to protect human life, land and property and to ensure that human dignity is respected by all. When leaders fail in their duties, citizens suffer greatly. Most human-inflicted hardships can be attributed to irresponsible stewardship of leaders. Structures that discriminate and dehumanise human persons on the grounds of religion, ethnicity, tribe, gender or political affiliation, whatever their ideology, must be dismantled.

Conclusion

We are grateful to God who made it possible for us to hold our Thirteenth Annual Conference this year. We thank God in a special way for the gift of knowledge and wisdom given to humans to be able to discover the means of connecting one another notwithstanding distances. Humans have continued in various ways to carry out the divine injunction in Genesis 1:28 (to discover and respectfully utilise the potentials of the earth). It is our prayer that in doing this, they do not work for their own destruction and that of the rest of creation. Humans have been made to share in God's sovereignty. This sharing presupposes profound respect for the land, all its inhabitants and human life very dear God who made human beings in God's own image and likeness. The value we attribute to human life often informs our attitude towards other creatures. Racial discrimination and all other forms of prejudice in our human interactions will be eliminated when we, all humans, consciously embrace and live by our common origin and destiny in God.

May the Blessed Virgin Mary, the Mother of the Word Incarnate and our Mother, Saint Joseph, the legal father of Jesus, and all the Martyrs and Saints of Africa intercede for us. Amen.

Signed:

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