

**Communiqué issued by the Catholic Biblical Association of Nigeria (CABAN)
at the end of its Fifteenth Annual Conference held at Madonna Renewal Center
Nkpor, Onitsha, Anambra State, 22nd- 25th November 2022**

1. Introduction

The Catholic Biblical Association of Nigeria (CABAN), with members from different parts of Nigeria and beyond held its Fifteenth Annual Conference at Madonna Renewal Center, Nkpor, Onitsha, Anambra State, 22nd - 25th November 2022. The theme of the conference, “The Bible on Synodality: Walking together in Communion, Participation and Mission” signaled their participation in the ongoing 2021- 2024 Synod on Synodality, convoked by the synodal Pope Francis, on the theme “For a Synodal Church, Communion, Participation and Mission”. In attendance were his Eminence John Cardinal Onayeikan (Archbishop Emeritus of the Archdiocese of Abuja), Most Rev. Dr. Denis Chidi Isizoh (Auxiliary Bishop of Onitsha), Mother Mary Claude Oguh, IHM (Mother General of the Sisters of the Immaculate Heart of Mary, Mother of Christ who own the venue of the conference) and many priests, sisters, seminarians and some lay people engaged in the biblical apostolate. After intensive and prayerful listening to and discussions on the paper presentations that explored synodality in different passages of the Bible, we issue and share with the general public this Communiqué.

2. Our Core Discovery on Synodality in the Bible

We discovered and acknowledge with gratitude that synod is a core biblical reality in the longstanding tradition of the people of God; it remains today the essential means, as well as path, way (*hodos*) along which God’s people are invited to journey together (*synhodos*), listen, pray, walk, minister and proclaim the gospel. Fundamentally, synodality constitutes the very life and character of our Trinitarian God who in the Bible do everything inseparably together from creation (cf. Gen:1: 3, 26-27), through redemption (cf. John 3:16; 2 Cor 5:11-19), to sanctification (cf. John 16:12-115), for the good of humanity and creation. By creating human beings “in God’s image and likeness” (Gen 1:26-27, 5:1-2; 9:6), God has equally built and ingrained synodality into the fabric and structure of the human body: the different parts of the body work synergically, synodally, inseparably and instinctively together, always in unison; and for the good of the entire body, as do the three persons of the Blessed Trinity. No part of the body is self-serving. The same applies to the different works of creation (Genesis 1). Each part of the body exists in its own right. No part of the body is insignificant or expendable. No part of creation exists for itself.

We posit that this awareness of how our Trinitarian God, the different parts of our human body and the parts of creation work together offer unique and easily accessible insight for understanding synodality and how the Church that desires to become a truly synodal Church, and whose members together are “the body of Christ” (1 Corinthians 12, esp. v. 27), should live and work together in service to the gospel. We say, “easily accessible”, because each person can reflect on and learn from how the different parts of their individual body work together. Further, every Christian is baptized into the life of the Trinity.

We equally discovered that in the New Testament, synodality is witnessed by members of the early church who struggled to overcome their ingrained, Torah-based ethnic and other differences and prejudices in order “with one heart and soul” (Acts 4:32) to share their life together, encourage

one another as people of “the Way” (Acts 9:2), which is Jesus (John 14:6), and participate together in the mission he entrusted to them. Also at the heart of God’s plan of salvation, is the call and destiny of the entire human race to be united with God in Christ, “the new humanity” (Eph 2:15), and to promote this unity through diverse ministries in the Church, understood as God’s gathering and reconciling of humanity and the entire creation to the divine self in Christ (cf. Col 1:20; Eph 1:10). Overcoming these challenges was not easy for them, as we see, for instance, in the struggle between the Church in Jerusalem (representing Jewish Christians) and that in Antioch (representing the Gentiles); a struggle that led to the first synod of Jerusalem (Acts 15:1-35). And between Peter and Paul in Antioch (Gal 2:11-16). Yet they persevered in their efforts to walk together in communion, participation and mission, principally by listening to and unanimously aligning themselves with the Spirit of unity (cf. Acts 15:28).

We equally discovered that in this synodal journey towards the realization of God’s created will for humanity, everyone matters, even slave in danger of death, like that of the centurion Cornelius (Acts 7:1-10); no one is an outsider, a spectator or an appendix to this call to communion, participation and mission in service to the gospel. Therefore, everyone is to be listened to, treated with their God-given respect and dignity and given every opportunity to live and develop their God-given potential as beings created in God’s own image and likeness, empowered “to become God’s children” in Christ (cf. John 1:12-13); called by their baptismal mandate to actively participate in the mission of the Church. Every individual equally has the personal responsibility to actively participate in the life and mission of the synodal Church.

3. Call to Cultivate Synodality in Church and Society

In solidarity with God, CABAN recognizes the need for our society, the Church, especially in Nigeria and Africa, to reexamine the nature and extent of their faithfulness to the call to walk in the gospel path, listening to their members in the life of communion and participation in the mission of proclaiming the gospel. Our reflections on many scriptural passages (examples, Gen 9:8-17; Num 11:24-30; Josh 24:1-28; 1 Sam 8; Pss 122; Prov 18:13; Luke 7: 1-10; 9:49-50; 18:35-43; Acts 15; Gal 2:1-10; Eph 2:11-22) challenge us to profess allegiance to the one true God, to reject disunity, disbelief, greed, corruption, violence, injustice and other forms of false gods in our society which are opposed to the synodal spirit. Equally opposed to the synodal spirit are marginalization and neglect of the poor; prejudice; discriminations of all forms; tribalism; the rise of neo-paganism; poor leadership in Church and society; indifference to climate change; ab-use of religion as political tool to generate conflicts; political violence; fundamentalism; religious intolerance; and lack of ecumenical spirit. We are equally challenged to listen to and dialogue with people of other faiths and cultures in order to bring them along to journey with us in God’s synodal path and will for humanity and creation.

4. Graces and Challenges of Synodality in Africa

We appreciate our cherished African values grounded in the Scriptures, especially the sense of community which we must continue to cultivate, “I am because we are and because we are I am” (Ubuntu). We believe that it is time for us to intensify our efforts to identify, cultivate and implement creative ways of inculturating our cultural values in the church’s liturgical worship and life, without watering down the Christian faith; or promoting syncretism. Being disposed and open to God’s invitation to journey with God and with one another in love and unity is crucial, especially among the clergy and between them and the lay faithful who are constantly being bombarded with

all kinds of material calls and distracted by the many voices within and outside the Church that proclaim, as most desirable goods, materialism, subjectivism, selfishness and inordinate attachment to wealth.

5. Counting Our Blessings

We realize that in spite of the challenges facing us, our good God continues to care for humanity and the Church in Africa and beyond, and to protect them against all adversities. As God's people walking synodally together in service to the gospel, we are grateful for creation, the blessings of fertile land, rich ecology, fruitful sea, green vegetation, abundant mineral and human resources and God's many other blessing. Acknowledging these blessings also invites us as Church and society to relearn and appreciate the importance of history as a synodal value. To learn to be trustful caretakers of the gift of nature and creation as counselled by Pope Francis in *Laudato Si'*. We keep our eyes focused on, and draw strength from the Holy Spirit. We equally stand firm on God's gift of resilience and fortitude to Nigeria and Africa to persevere as synodal Church in the face of all difficulties, exploitations and persecutions.

6. Renewed Commitment and Way Forward

We believe that as members of the synodal Church today, at the local, national, continental and universal levels, we are invited to renew our commitment to living and proclaiming "the joy of the gospel" (*Evangelii Gaudium*), individually and together. In the socio-political era of the upcoming 2023 elections in our country, Nigeria, the leadership of the synodal Church must never relent in listening attentively to Jesus, God-Word "become flesh" (John 1:14), whom God gives to humanity as the way, the truth [reality substance] and the life" (John 14:6); and pay keen attention to (obey) the voice of the Holy Spirit who, in leading humanity to realise its created potential, speaks through the Scriptures, the church leadership, individual members and the signs of the times rooted in the gospel. After listening to and hearing, to respond joyfully and urge all its members to do the same.

7. Conclusion

The foregoing submission invites us to renew our desire and commitment to listen to God speaking in the Bible and thorough one another, led by the Holy Spirit; to walk together in communion and participate in God's mission entrusted to the Church. We invoke the help of Mary, the Mother of the synodal Church and Saint Joseph, Patron of the universal Church, in our journey together towards becoming a truly synodal Church rooted in the Bible, in Christ who gives full meaning to the Bible (cf. John 5:39). They both first heard God's good news for humanity, kept it (Luke 1:26-38; Matt 1:18-25) and journeyed together with the child Jesus till he was able to fulfil his mission as God's Good News and Messiah for humanity. May they help us, God's people without exception, to receive and live by the same synodal grace as they did.

Signed:

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