



**A Communiqué Issued at the End of the 16th Annual Conference
of the Catholic Biblical Association of Nigeria (CABAN)
Held at the Catholic Secretariat of Nigeria Resource Centre
Durumi, Abuja 14th – 17th November 2023**

0. Preamble

We the members of the Catholic Biblical Association of Nigeria (CABAN), from different parts of Nigeria, held our 16th annual Conference at the Catholic Secretariat of Nigeria Resource Centre, Durumi, Abuja, from 14th to 17th November, 2023, on the theme: **War and Peace in the Bible**. The Conference sought to examine the biblical concept of war and peace with a view to proffering solutions to contemporary wars and energising peace initiatives. Among the participants were His Lordship, Most Rev. Dr. Anselm Umoren, MSP, Auxiliary Bishop of the Catholic Archdiocese of Abuja, representing His Grace, Most Rev. Dr. Ignatius Kaigama, the Archbishop of the Catholic Archdiocese of Abuja; His Eminence, John Cardinal Onaiyekan, Emeritus Archbishop of Abuja; His Lordship, Most Rev. Dr. Martin Olorunmolu, Catholic Bishop of Lokoja; Very Rev. Fr. Zacharia Samjumi, Secretary General of the Catholic Secretariat of Nigeria (CSN); Rev. Fr. Prof. Cornelius Omonokhua, Executive Secretary of Nigeria Inter-Religious Council (NIREC); the religious, clergy and lay faithful from Abuja Federal Capital Territory (FCT).

In this Communiqué we present the main discoveries from our individual research and plenary discussions and offer salient recommendations about war and peace in the Bible:

1. Biblical Notion of War

We understand that war has been a defining element of human history, and the Bible is replete with a plethora of them. War in the Bible is both physical (1 Kgs 22:1-38) and spiritual (Eph 6:10-18) by nature. Biblical physical wars are caused by conflicting interests between parties, interests rooted in religious beliefs, socioeconomic and political matters, the pursuit of wealth and power and the scarcity of human and material resources. Physical wars in the Bible occur predominantly during the times of conquest, settlement and expansion of territory (the Books of Numbers through Judges to Kings). We discovered that ancient cultural belief about a nation's deity as its war champion and cumulative biblical hermeneutics have negatively portrayed the Bible as supporting and encouraging war. We therefore urge that the Bible not be used as authority and vehicle for promoting and executing wars. Scientific works on the Bible set within its diverse socio-cultural and political contexts need to be vigorously pursued by exegetes for clearer interpretations of biblical texts dealing with war. The fruits of their efforts should be the solid basis of judgment and recommendations on matters pertaining to biblical teachings on war.

2. Biblical Understanding of Peace

Wisdom is an essential quality of genuine human and peaceful co-existence (Isa 11:1-0). Wise persons always seek and desire peace. Only foolish persons plan in their hearts evil that unsettles the balance of peaceful wellbeing in society. We affirm that from the biblical understanding of peace as all-round wholeness, not absence of war, we can only achieve peace by being in the right with God (Isa 26:3; 32:17) and through wholehearted reconciliation with others (Matt 5:23-24). Consequently,

where there is no righteousness, there can be no peace. This righteousness is embodied in the love of our fellow human beings, a love which is modelled on God's love for all humanity (John 3:16). Furthermore, the biblical understanding of peace involves the acceptance of the gospel message of salvation. Refusal to accept this message is usually the cause of divisions which rent the fabric of peace (Luke 12:51-53). Essentially, peace in the Bible is God's restoration of all creation to the purpose God intended for it from the beginning. It requires a keen realisation, acceptance and celebration of the truth that God has indeed restored and reconciled humanity and the entire creation to the divine self in and through Christ (Col 1:20; Eph 1:10).

3. Contemporary Causes of War and Appeal for Peace

We observe that one of the major causes of war, and a factor which continues to perpetuate it in the world today, is inherent mutual hatred and rivalry among persons and nations handed down from generation to generation. We state that no one is born with inherent hatred for another human being. If we can learn to hate, we can equally learn to love, since, as children of God who is love (1 John 4:16, 18), we possess innate capacity to love. We therefore urge our generation to divorce itself from the warring legacy of past millennia; to cultivate and embrace the gospel of peace and to believe that a peaceful co-existence is possible. We urge this generation to honestly identify the basic causes of war and fashion out effective ways of dealing with them. Apart from centuries-old hatred and rivalry, there is the lack of sufficient visionary leaders on the global political arena who can make decisions and evolve measures that promote peace, instead of focusing on amassing wealth and perpetuating themselves in power. The self-interest of leaders has plunged nations into avoidable wars resulting in massive loss of human life and infrastructural destruction. Similarly, external interference in the internal affairs of nations greatly foments wars. We reiterate that human life created in God's "image and likeness" (Gen 1:27; 5:1-3) is sacred, and as such must be esteemed and protected. In order to avoid wars, we recommend that words which contain messages of hope (Isa 40:1) be professed and espoused by individuals and those in leadership positions at all levels.

4. Requirements for Peacemaking

We posit that the contemporary phenomenon of sustained war and conflicts is caused by inadequate peace making approaches such as we find in Acts 6:3, and lacklustre peace keeping drives. There is always adverse consequence in waging war, but beneficial consequence in working for peace (Prov 12:20). While war deprives people of their material and spiritual wellbeing, peace consolidates total wellbeing (Micah 4:3). Efforts towards achieving true peace must begin from the human heart. We affirm that peace is possible through nonviolent measures. For peace to reign in society and families, every individual must actively work for peace. When we work for peace, we act as "children of God" (Matt 5:9), and manifest God's innate image and likeness in us. We call for adequate management and distribution of resources and power sharing within geopolitical entities and globally to prevent the eruption of wars. Thus, justice which upholds equity and equality must vigorously be pursued. We equally urge civil authorities to work zealously to defend their citizens from internal and external aggressors and predators. In this vein, peace is ironically a value to be fought for.

5. Jesus, the Embodiment of God's Peace in the Bible

In the prophecy about the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ (Isa 9:6), at his birth in Bethlehem (Luke 2:14), throughout his actions and teachings during his public ministry (Luke 22:51), by his mere

presence (Luke 23:12) and in the events of his passion, death and resurrection, Jesus, the Prince of Peace, embodied and preached God's peace. His teachings, proclamations and deeds manifest how to make peace and live it. They call for vigorous pursuit of peace and give the reasons for them. The gospels thus cumulatively portray Jesus as the embodiment and model of peace in the Bible. His peace differs from what the world regards as peace (John 14:27) for it imparts all-round wholeness to persons, families, communities and society. We recommend that Christians understudy him as the embodiment of peace and model their life, actions and efforts of peace on him.

6. Recommendations for Making Sustainable Peace Globally

We call on all God's children to see each other as God's creation, whose life is to be absolutely held sacred, and rights are to be respected and considered sacrosanct. All must eschew the use of the social media to spread false propaganda that unsettle peaceful coexistence in various communities and foment wars. We urge everyone to speak and stand for the truth at all times and in all circumstances Where truth reigns, there is justice. Where justice is enshrined, peace is engendered. We equally recognise the necessity of praying to God for peace. To this end, we recommend that sustained prayers for lasting peace be regularly held in families, communities, churches and other places of worship, and that peace making activities be regularly undertaken. Every person needs to see peacemaking as their personal responsibility, irrespective of age, class and political or religious affiliation. We urge everyone to respect the position of others and thus establish a neutral ground for genuine dialogue that can lead to sustainable peaceful coexistence.

7. Conclusion

Our conference on war and peace in the Bible has surfaced the need for more in-depth study of the two concepts in the Bible. Biblical language in their ancient cultural settings, whereby everything is attributed to God, good or bad, give the impression that God ordains and even champions war. Yet this much is clear: that human beings are the originators of war. War happens because humans are not at peace, not at right with God and with one another. The New Testament consistently invites us to discern and guard against the anti-God tendencies and desires in us that foment war and disrupt peace. It urges us, as God's children, to engage in sustained spiritual battle against the wiles of "our enemy the devil" by putting on "the whole armour of God" marshalled out in Ephesians 6:10-18: truth, righteousness, eagerness to preach the gospel of peace; the shield of faith, anchored in constant prayer. In this way we fortify ourselves, families, communities and nations against selfishness, injustice, greed for power and money, domination and all types of allurements that lead to war. The central biblical message is that God is peace. If all human beings live and act like God in whose image and likeness they were created, there will be peace in homes, nations and world. When we offer God's peace to others, we offer goodwill from God and we receive this goodwill in return.

Signed:

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