



A Communiqué Issued at the end the 17th Annual Conference of the Catholic Biblical Association of Nigeria (CABAN), Held at the Jubilee Retreat and Conference Centre (JRCC), Effurun, Warri 5th -8th November, 2024

1. Preamble

We the members of the Catholic Biblical Association of Nigeria (CABAN), from different part of Nigeria and beyond, held our 17th Annual Conference at the Jubilee Retreat and Conference Centre (JRCC), Effurun, Warri, from 5th to 8th November 2024, on the theme: "Sickness and Healing in the Bible." What does the Bible say about sickness and healing? What are the general and specific kinds of diseases and illnesses recorded in the Bible, how did they come about and what were the remedies? What theological, pastoral and spiritual lessons can we learn from the biblical episodes of illnesses and healings for our contemporary society? These were some of the questions that inspired the theme of our conference. The Conference explored various ways in which the Bible demonstrates God's actions in both the Old and New Testaments: "I am the LORD, your healer" (Exod 15:26); and "he went about all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and preaching the gospel of the kingdom and healing every disease and every infirmity among the people" (Matt 4:23).

Among the participants were His Excellency, Most Rev. Dr. Anthony O. Ewherido, Bishop of the Diocese of Warri; His Eminence, John Cardinal O. Onaiyekan, Emeritus Archbishop of Abuja; His Excellency, Most Rev. Dr. Camillus R. Umoh the Bishop of Ikot Ekpene Diocese; His Excellency, Most Rev. Dr. Patrick Eluke. Auxiliary Bishop of Port Harcourt Diocese. The religious, clergy and the lay faithful from the Catholic Diocese of Warri also participated. In this Communiqué we share pertinent findings from our individual research and the fruits of the plenary discussions and offer relevant recommendations on sickness and healing in the Bible.

2. Biblical Notion of Sickness

We understand that sickness and healing are universal human phenomena. From the biblical point of view, illness or sickness simply signifies "lack of health." Illness is often a physical, spiritual and psychological reality. Some of the physical ones in the Bible include: boils and sores (Exod 9:9; Job 2:7; 2 Kgs 20:1-11; Isa 38:21); leprosy (Num 12:10; 2 Kgs 5:1-19; 2 Chr 16:12-13; 2 Chr 26:21; Matt 11:5; Luke 17:11-19); blindness (John 9:1-41; dropsy (Luke 14:2);epilepsy (Matt 7:15; Mk 9:17-18); fever (Matt 8:14; Mk 1:30; Luke 4:38); haemorrhaging (Matt 9:20; Mk 5:25; Luke 8:48). Others are, insanity (1 Sam 21:13; Dan 4:33-35), paralysis (Matt 4:24; 8:6; 9:2; Mk 2:3; Luke 5:18; 13:11; Acts 3:2), sunstroke (2 Kgs 4:18-20; Ps 121:5-6; Isa 49:10; John 4:8) and "thorns in the flesh" (2 Cor 12:1-10). As in all early cultures, scientific causality is not the primary factor in understanding illness in the Bible. Biblically, the most important question is not always how a person fell sick, but why? We discovered in our discussion that causes and cure of sicknesses always have deep, holistic, communal and religious dimensions. Questions about personal lifestyle, social networking, sins and its symbolic character of failure to take responsibility (as in John 5:1-15) are equally drawn into the discourse. Thus, biblical narratives encourage both careful reflection and sincere prayer for holistic healing, when dealing with sickness and illness.

3. Biblical Health and Healing

Health and healing in a secular sense may involve medical, surgical, or psychiatric treatments of pathological conditions. This may also culminate in functional repairs and sometimes the actual regeneration of a previously diseased or damaged parts of the human body or mind. As in other ancient cultures, we understand biblical health and healing in a holistic manner, as expressed in the biblical notion of peace (*šālôm/eirēnē*), which can be translated as “prosperity,” “safety,” “wholeness,” “well-being,” “completeness,” “soundness,” “welfare” and “health.” That is to say that health in the biblical sense is multi-dimensional in terms of qualities that pertain to human beings. It is the wholeness, the well-being and completeness of being in itself in relation to God, to others and to the world as illustrated in Hezekiah's healing narrative (2 Kgs 20:1-11; 2 Chron 32:24-26; Isa 38:1-22). To be healed is to be complete. Although full healing happens only in the life to come, we acknowledge God's genuine healing through the ministry of Jesus and the Apostles, in the present (Isa 35:4-6; 61:1-3; Jer 33:6; Matt 11:3-6; Luke 4:18-21). God heals, and people are renewed and restored in every aspect of their lives. God's healings of human beings, nations, communities and creation is a gift and not merely spiritual or ethereal. Healing, we understand comes as part of the renewal of the whole person. It occurs through the power and in the presence of God (1 Thess 5:23). Divine healing, though it requires faith, prayer, and obedience extends to all (Gen 20:17; Matt 4:24; 8:16; 12:15; Mark 6:56; Luke 4:40; 7:7). It can come through extraordinary means, that is, God's grace, as well as through ordinary means or created order such as, water, herbs, plants, salt, nurses, physicians, other human agents and health care services (Sir 38:1-14; Exod 15:22-27; 2 Kgs 20:1-11). We hold that healing is found in Jesus Christ, and his Church, as announced in the New Testament, where God's presence is fully and most clearly manifest (Matt 4:23).

4. Healing and Faith of the Community

We note that there is a relationship between faith and healing, although that relationship is not calculable or predictable. In the Old and New Testaments healing comes as a result of faith (2 Kgs 2:1-11; Mark 5:34). Healing also produces faith (Mark 1:27; Acts 9:42). The faith of the family (Mark (:23-24), or, the community (Mark 2:5; James 5:15) can be instrumental in the healing of one of its members. To have the faith to be healed means to be willing to be open to God's all-knowing and loving plan. Healing faith may be the trusting and seeking attitude of the one to be healed (Mark 5:34), and/or the Christological faith of the apostolic community through and in which God heals (Acts 3:16). Truly, in the saying, " your faith has made you well," Jesus defines a healing that offers both physical renewal and saving reconciliation with God, self, and others. Healing in Christ overcomes the alienation that derives from being a social outcast (Luke 17:19) or ritually unclean (Luke 8:48). We also hold that because the Lord is a God of promise and fulfilment, health and renewal can be confidently prayed and hoped for, though these are not to be sought through manipulative means or abuses such as we find in healing centers and crusade grounds today worldwide.

5. Sickness, Healing and Contemporary Challenges

We realize that, the biblical people were born, grew and felt ill, sometimes recovered, but eventually died. Like us today, they cried out in pain, and distress, and they also rejoice in healing and renewal. Many today in our cultures, in moments of illnesses, disappointments, sicknesses, plagues, diseases, sufferings and general misfortunes, migrate to prayer houses, hospitals, and other healing homes and centers, traditional and orthodox, in search for healing. Abuses of all kinds are recorded in some of these healing centers. Hence, CABAN stresses that healing is not a commodity to be dispensed by ministers, achieved or purchased by the individual (2 Kgs 5:15-16). Healing is a gratuitous gift of God, that comes not apart from,

but along with, forgiveness and salvation (Mark 2:9-12). Like forgiveness and salvation, God's healing is free, given without material and other inordinate conditions, undue preoccupations and demands, we find in some contemporary healing centers and homes. Biblically and in the practice of the Church, healing will be found in the context of the gospel, as part of the ministry of the Word and Sacraments. Prayers for and services of healing should be a normal part of the ministry, complementing the preaching of the Gospel and the administration of the sacraments.

6. Recommendations

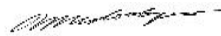
We call on all God's children to realize that although Christian life promises joy and salvation, it also invites us to bear our crosses patiently, for the sake of others (Mark 15:31-32). We must accept the fact that, sickness and death are universal and unavoidable human experiences. In every circumstance of life, there is a message God may want us to hear, even in moments of sickness. Those, especially Catholic ministers, involved in healing ministry must eschew abuses, self-aggrandizement, seeking for material gains, and discern what healing God wishes to bring about in the recipient and freely dispose the sick and the needy for God's grace. Making up one's mind about the basic fact that simple and pure faith, sincere and constant repentance, daily identification with the following of Jesus' values and life style are indispensable. All of us are invited to humbly obey the teachings of the Church. This is more important than self-arrogations because obedience is better than sacrifice. In addition, everyone needs to recognize that to be well, or healthy, as a Christian is not to be touched by pain, sickness, illness or other forms of sufferings, to participate in Christ's own greater love (John 15:13).

7. Conclusion

Truly, the Bible bears particular witness to God's healing, thus providing us with important resource in our present quest for good health, meaningful life, holistic living and salvation (*šālôm*). Thus, each of us must enter that quest aware of the finitude and mortality not only of the people of the biblical time, but also our people today in our cultures and contexts. Healing is not a guaranteed right of exclusive people of faith. It is God's gifts to peoples of all walks of life, time and culture. We hold that healing in Christ at the end of the day is cruciform (Isa 53:5 Luke 23:25; Acts 3:15-16; 2 Cor 12:5-10). We pray through the intercession of Mary, the mother of Jesus, our healer and of Saint Joseph, that all may be encouraged by biblical stories, to always engage in a careful reflection and sincere prayer to Christ, our healer, in moments of sickness and suffering.



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