

the community. According to a saying "man is only man in context of a community, apart from it, it is either an angel or a god." While one would slightly disagree with the exaggeration here, one could not agree less with the fact that the community is important for man. However, what makes the complete man is the combination of his interior and external life.

From the foregoing, it must be said that while existentialism in reaction to modernism has set a new paradigm for understanding man, it is contestable if its thesis can reach the desired objective: explaining the entity called man. While it struck the right cord by hammering on what is missed out by the modernist thesis, it left out an all-important aspect of him, which is the perspective that man is a being who has not only an interior life, but also an external life.

HEALTH AND HEALING IN THE BOOK OF TOBIT AND THE HEALING MINISTRY TODAY

Francis Adesina

The fascinating story narrated in the book of Tobit, like a well fashioned fairy-tale, captures the attention of its readers as it unfolds, introducing an angel and a demon, a magical fish and a faithful dog, a journey and a lady in total distress. As one enjoys the creative mind of the story-teller, one cannot but get in touch with his profound messages. One of the concerns that feature prominently in the story is the concern for the value of family life and its affiliate exigencies. Alexander A. Di Lella puts it better, when he states that the book of Tobit "features the value of family life and religious fidelity as well as the perennial concerns for health and healing."¹ We may remark here that, although the book of Tobit is not so much cited in the New Testament, its theology and messages are relevant to the composition of many New Testament writings.

The focus of this essay is to highlight the concern for health, wholeness and healing in the book of Tobit. Although this is not the primary intention of the author, it is a major theme developed by him as he endeavors to illustrate and convince his second century readers how faithful people can live according to the Law of Yahweh outside their homeland. While focusing on his main theme, the author of Tobit betrays his interest on issues of health, healing and human wholeness. He allows this secondary theme to develop in his composition and to span through the length and breadth of the narrative. Our interest in Tobit's concern for health, healing and wholeness is premised on the fact that the book provides an opportunity to search for the authentic roots of the phenomenon of healing in the biblical traditions beginning from the Old Testament to the New Testament; so that, we may be able to draw from

¹ Alexander A. Di Lella, "Health and Healing in Tobit" *The Bible Today*, Vol. 37, Nm. 3, (March/April 1999), p. 69.

the consistent venerable tradition of our Judeo-Christian faith, the right attitude and practice of healing in the Church today. It is our hope that this study would provide some Biblical and theological parameters to evaluate the ministry of healing in the Church. The need for such parameters is evident.

There is no doubt in our mind that as the Church continues Christ's mission of bringing relief and succor to the suffering and the sick, to those who are troubled in mind, body and spirit, through preaching, teaching and healing, there is the possibility of abuses and exaggeration on the part of the human ministers who dispense God's healing and the beneficiaries. These abuses and excesses are clearly observable in the ways and manners miracles are advertised in the media and carried out in various healing/miracle centers that sporadically spring up in the villages, towns and cities across Nigeria in particular, and Africa in general. The recent clamp down on media evangelism and miracle advertisement in Nigeria by the National Broadcasting Commission (NBC) is a pointer to fears of bastardization of the Gospel of Christ. Many times the good news is narrowed down to healing and working of miracles, real or stage-managed.² This study is intended to assist us to appreciate the proper place of healing in the economy of salvation by drawing inspiration from the life and attitude of the main characters of the book of Tobit.

The method adopted in this study is based on a synchronic reading of the book of Tobit. This approach will afford us the opportunity of gaining an insight into the book in general—its background, narrative, characters, theology and messages. We shall not be pre-occupied with the critical problems of the literary work, many though they are, for such engagement would only serve to distract from the objective of the study. However, whenever the text posits any difficult, attention will be called to it.

² Barnidele Johnson, "The Hammer dangles on Pastors" *The News*, Vol. 22, No. 10, (15 March, 2004) p. 21-23. Cf. Desmond Udomwen, "Miracles not well packaged" *The News*, Vol. 22, No. 10, (15 March, 2004) p. 24-25).

Understanding the Book of Tobit

Tobit is the short but interesting domestic story of a pious Hebrew family that survives tragedy through Yahweh's providential care. It has a lot of similarity with the book of Job. Most probably, behind the book of Tobit was a Semitic original written in Aramaic in the early second century B.C.E and later translated into Greek. However, because the book was not included in the Hebrew Canon, the Aramaic version ceased to be copied and was lost. Three different forms of the story survived in Greek language namely, the version found in Codex Sinaiticus (S), in Vaticanus (B) and in Alexandrinus (A). Fragments containing some portions of the book in Aramaic and Hebrew were discovered among the Dead Sea Scrolls at Qumran. It must be said that most current translations of Tobit are based on Codex Sinaiticus and supplemented by the other two Greek versions. Tobit is among the "deutero-canonical" books recorded in the official canonical list in the West from the time of the Roman Synod of 382 and, in the East since the Council of Constantinople in 692 A.C.E.

Looking through the book of Tobit, one encounters at the beginning and the end of the story some historical notes concerning various rulers in Assyria, their human weaknesses and the eventual collapse of their authority. These historical annotations are carefully used by the narrator to contextualize the story within a particular historical setting.³ For instance, the murder of Shalmaneser is mentioned in Tob 1:15 and the eventual destruction of the city of Nineveh in Tob 14:15. This historical summary is the ingenuity to demonstrate that Yahweh is in charge of human affairs. He punishes the wicked, even though for a time they may appear to prosper.⁴

³ There are radically opposed views on the matter of the historicity of Tobit. There those who hold the traditional view of the Church that the book relates to history. It gives account of real persons, in real geographical and historical circumstances (A. Miller). There are those who assert that the story of Tobit is pure fiction. They defend their opinion citing the many historical and geographical errors in the book. They claim a good part of the narrative presumes the intervention of supernatural forces or is clearly intended to imply the working of miracles. These scholars relate the story of Tobit to the fables of the Grateful Dead and to the legend of Achikar, whose name appears as a character in the book (M. Luther, C. Moyer and lately Irene Nowell).

⁴ Cf. Ps 1:5-6; 35:5; 112:10; Job 21:18.

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Sandwiched between the aforementioned historical notes are two fascinating stories. The first been the story of Tobit, a man who "walked in paths of truth and in good works all the days of his life", and who was struck with blindness.⁵ The other is the pathetic episode of another devout Hebrew woman, the daughter of Raguel whose name was Sarah. She lost seven bridegrooms as a result of the attack of Asmodeus⁶ and became the subject of public ridicule of maids in her father's house. The journey of Tobiah (Tob 4:1-12) commissioned by his father serves as the literary web joining the two tragic-comedic episodes. The story has a joyful ending: the healing of Tobit and Sarah, and the eventual prosperity of both families, demonstrating Yahweh's faithfulness to the cause of the just, even if, for a short time, they suffer.⁷

Title and Authorship

The book of Tobit is very controversial, and its controversial nature is not unconnected with determining the literary character of the book. While we may spare ourselves the rigors of the question of the literary texture we are dealing with, we cannot but face the issues of the book's title and authorship.

In the Vulgate and Douay versions, the father and the son are called by the same name Tobias (Tob 1:9) and from there, the book receives the title, "the words of Tobias". However, in other versions of the book, the father's name is Tobit and the son Tobiah.⁸ This latter designation, in the opinion of scholars, is the correct one. Both names are Greek forms (*toby*) derived and abbreviated from the Hebrew *ṭobyāh* (*Tov hoyah*) meaning Yahweh is my good or my good is Yahweh.

⁵ Cf. Trail of a Just Man in wisdom literatures (Pss 37; 73; Job 29).

⁶ A derivation from Persian language *asmoda*. Its etymology is difficult. However, there is a Hebrew root *śamad*, which means "the destroyer". Asmodeus could have been a name commonly in use in Semitic circles for the devil, somewhat like Beelzebub at the time of Christ without specific doctrinal implications.

⁷ Cf. Prosperity of the righteous man in Wisdom Literature-Ps 1:1-2; Deut 30:15-16; Prov. 4:18-19; Jer. 21:8.

⁸ Cf. NJB, RSV, NIV etc.

On the question of authorship, internal evidence from the book supports the view that the work was a composition of Tobit and Tobias following the instruction of Raphael in Tob 12:20. It is quite possible that these main characters, if they were real historical figures, were the first to put down their own experience in a primitive form. In this way, the story comes from them. It could also have been passed down orally or in a very simple written form upon which latter composition would have been written by an inspired author. It must be mentioned categorically, that the final author is unknown and that nothing has come down to us concerning the actual author of the book of Tobit.

Historical Context of Tobit

One general point that must be borne in mind as we consider the original historical context of the book of Tobit is the fact that the author of the story treats history and geography with a good deal of freedom. According to the book, Tobit was a young man when the kingdom was divided after the death of Solomon in 931 B.C.E. (Tob 1:4). He was deported with the tribe of Naphtali in 734 B.C.E. (Tob 1:5) and Tobiah, his son did not die until after the fall of Nineveh in 612 B.C.E. (Tob 14:15). With this historical frame in mind, most scholars postulate that the book of Tobit was written in the early second century B.C.E. at the time when Israel was under the control of Seleucid kings of Syria. Most scholars agree that the book was composed about 200 B.C.E. and most probably in Palestine.

The second century author sets his story of Tobit in an earlier time. He situates his narrative into the settings of the eight-seventh centuries B.C.E. the major political power at that time was Assyria, a country of Northern Mesopotamia, where Iraq is located today.⁹ During this period, the Assyrian warlords dominated the countries of the Fertile Crescent up to Egypt. They were cruel conquerors, who deliberately devastated and neutralized their targets. They killed and tortured many inhabitants of defeated lands (Tob 1:18-20). They deported many others to foreign lands

⁹ Irene Nowell, "Tobit" *The International Bible Commentary* (The Liturgical Press Collegeville, Minnesota, 1998) p.689-695.

and resettled their lands with other strangers. One of such conquered people was the Israelites.

In 722 B.C.E. Sargon II, whose name was not mentioned in the book of Tobit, defeated Israel, the land of the ten northern tribes and deported many of the citizens. Tobit was one of the deportees (Tob 1:5). From the way and manner history and geography were handled in the book of Tobit, one has the impression that the intention of the author is to illustrate how faithful people can live according to the Law of Yahweh outside their home land, Israel. Tobit is a model and hero in this regard. He is presented to the second century readers and to contemporary readers as well as an example to emulate. The message is clear, namely that God's chosen people experience his providential care wherever they find themselves.

Structure and Plan

The structure and plan encountered in the book of Tobit is a straightforward one. It does not pose much challenge to scholars. For the purpose of the present study, we shall adopt and agree with the structure of Tobit proposed by Irene Nowell, Toni Craven and Demetrius Dunn.¹⁶ These scholars subscribed to a five plan structure as follows:

I. Distress in Ecbatana and Nineveh (Tob 1:1-3:17)

II. Preparation for the Journey (Tob 4:1-6:1)

III. The actual Journey (Tob 6:2-18)

IV. Resolution (Tob 1-11:18)

V. Conclusion (Tob 12:1-14:15)

The first part of the book starts with the title "the tale of Tobit, son of Ananias, son of Gabael..." (Tob 1:12), then it goes on to give a background of Tobit, the main character in the narrative (Tob 1:3-22), his distress and prayer (Tob 2:1-3:16). It also touches on Sarah's distress and prayer (Tob 3:7-15). This part of the tale closes with Raphael's

commission (Tob 3:16-17). The second part is brief. Expecting that God might take him from this world of suffering, Tobit instructs Tobias his son to lead a virtuous life (Tob 4:1-21), to seek out Gabael, a fellow-tribesman living in Media to whom he had given a sum of money (Tob 4:21-23). Tobias is apprehensive of his mission and hires Azarias (Angel Raphael in disguise) to lead him on his way (Tob 6:2-18). The third part of the episode describes the nitty-gritty of Tobias-Azarias' journey which includes an adventure with the miraculous fish (Tob 6:2-18). The next part is on the outcome of the journey. Tobias marries Sarah and heals her of Asmodeus nocturnal attacks (Tob 7:1-8:21). Tobias equally recovers his father's money (Tob 9:1-6), returns home to his anxious parents and then heals Tobit of his blindness (Tob 10:1-11:18). The concluding part of the book features the disclosure of the identity of Raphael (Tob 12:1-20); Tobit's prayer of thanksgiving (Tob 13:1-18), which is authentically parallel to his lamentation in Tob 3:2-6 and to Sarah's in Tob 3:11-15. This section ends with an epilogue recounting the last days of Tobit and Tobias.

By and large, this is a very fascinating story of two devout Jewish families who experienced trials but did not give up their faith in Yahweh. Joined together by marriage, they both received a reward for their faithfulness. It is not an exactly "a Hollywood romance" according to A. Di Lella¹⁷, but certainly a good and moving story with a happy ending. It shows that Yahweh is both just and free in his dealings with people. The narrator does not consider suffering as punishment but a test of faith. God does, in the long run, reward the just who trust in him and punishes the wicked, who wantonly breaks faith.

Health and Wholeness in the O.T.

The Hebrew (*shalom*), meaning health or wholeness, is a cognate of (*shalom*) which means peace, well-being or good fortune. Both in antiquity and in the O.T, health and wholeness were highly prized possessions. The Hebrews, as a matter of fact, tended to think of health

¹⁶ A. A. Di Lella, *ibid.* p. 70

¹⁷ I. Nowell, T. Craven and D. Dunn, "Tobit, Judith, Esther" *The New Jerome Biblical Commentary* (Great Britain, 1989) p. 569.

before Yahweh (Tob 1:3), observing meticulously the religious laws regarding Holy Pilgrimages and Tithing (Tob 1:6-80). He was married to Anna, a woman from his tribe (Tob 1:16-17). Risking his life and property, he engaged in what amounted to civil disobedience by burying the dead who had been slain by King Sennacherib (Tob 1:18). He fled for safety when his life was threatened and all his life possessions were confiscated (Tob 1:19-20). He was blinded by the hot droppings of sparrows that perched above him as he slept in the courtyard (Tob 2:9-10). Wearing by her husband's predicament, Anna was forced to work in order to support the family.¹⁶ She received a gift of a little goat over and above her wage, but her husband was too pious to believe her story. Thinking that Anna had stolen, Tobit ordered her to give the goat back to the owner. Anna was frustrated and she ridiculed Tobit's acts of charity. Embittered and grief-stricken as he was, Tobit prayed for death (Tobit 3:1-6).

In a similar episode, Sarah, the daughter of Raguel suffered a double attack, that of Asmodeus killing her seven husbands and the taunts of her father's maids who subjected her to public ridicule (Tob 3:8-9). Despondent Sarah contemplated suicide but decided against it for love of her father. Instead, she prayed for death like Tobit. There is a striking similarity in the plight of both characters. Both lacked what Hebrews would consider as "wholeness". Tobit was blind and he considered himself a dead man, who could not see the light (Tob 5:10). Sarah too was dead psychologically because she lacked the joy and satisfaction of marriage. Both characters were suffering personified. Nevertheless, they remained faithful to Yahweh. Their prayers were heard and Raphael¹⁷ was sent to heal them (Tob 3:16-17).

Health and Healing in the Book of Tobit

Health and healing is a major theme in the book of Tobit. Right from the first time the name of Raphael was introduced into the narrative (Tob

¹⁶ That a woman walked to support the family is striking detail for a story written in a male-dominated society of the Patriarchal period.

¹⁷ Raphael (*ṣ'pa'el*) occurs 13x in the LXX text of Tobit. It means God heals. Apart from the book of Tobit, it only occurs as proper name in 1 Chron 26:7. the verbal form of the word occurs more frequently in the O.T about 67x.

primarily in terms of physical strength and well-being. This is understandable considering their pastoral and agricultural pursuits. The qualities of an ideally healthy Jew are well summarized in the description of David in 1 Sam 16:18.¹²

In the earlier phases of Hebrew thought popularized by the Deuteronomists, diseases were regarded as divine visitation consequent upon disobedience or sin. Other etiological reasons were equally advanced as reasons for human sickness; such reasons included the work of adversary as in the case of Job (Job 2:7) or under divine permission when the spirit of deafness or dumbness is inflicted upon someone as is the case in Mark 9:17; or a result of parental sin as in John 9:2.¹³ On the other hand, good health, healing and material prosperity are considered divine gifts expected of the faithful in Israel. According to the deuteronomist doctrine of retribution, fidelity to the Law of Yahweh results in good health, economic prosperity, numerous children, good crops, long life, and a blessed memory after death; while infidelity brings the opposite and calamity (Deut 28, 1-46; 31, 15-20).¹⁴ Furthermore, O.T theology generally considers reward for the virtuous and punishment for the wicked to take place in the present world and not in the next.¹⁵ The idea of retribution after death is a product of later theology developed in Dan. 12:1-3; Wis. 1-5.

The Plight of Tobit and Sarah

Here we turn to look closely at the double woes in the book of Tobit, namely the plight of Tobit and Sarah. Tobit in the narrative is presented as a faithful Jew living in the Diaspora of Nineveh. He walked uprightly

¹² David was skilful in playing, a man of valour, a man of war, prudent in speech, and a man of good presence; and the Lord is with him."

¹³ R.K. Harrison, "Healing, Health" *The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible* (Abingdon Press Nashville, 1962) p. 541-548. Cf. W. Caspari and Pedersen (ILC) claim that Shalom in the LXX has a broadened meaning, which includes "good fortune", "well-being" and "totality". It represents a fundamental concept of ancient Israel's thought world and psychic life.

¹⁴ A.A. Di Lella, *Ibid.* p.70

¹⁵ Cf. Job 14:12; Sir 3:21; 9:12; 14:16-17; 30:4-5; Ps. 102:26; Is 19:5; 15:6.

3:17), the reader and the author of the story know that Raphael is an angel and that his purpose is to bring healing in answer to the prayers of Tobit and Sarah. But the irony is that other characters in the drama were kept in the dark about Raphael's identity and purpose. They failed to understand the real significance of the name and lineage he assumed.¹⁸ Raphael's name occurs about twenty-four times in the entire O.T. and fourteen times in Tobit underscoring the theme of health and healing in the book of Tobit.¹⁹ Raphael meaning Yahweh heals is certainly a play on word.

Another expression or word used in the book of Tobit to bring out the theme of health and healing is (*hygiaino*). *Hygiaino* means to be healthy, to be well. It occurs twenty-six times in the book and eight times in Tob 5:16-22. These occurrences signal the fact that health and healing is a major concern in the book, particularly in Chapter 5. In these occurrences, Tobit used the word most. He used it eleven times; the narrator-three times; Tobiah-twice and Edna-only once.²⁰ Thus, one could claim that *hygiaino* in the book of Tobit functions as a medical or therapeutic terminology.

Theology of Healing in the Book of Tobit

The theology of healing in the book of Tobit is very brief, but potent. It is better appreciated in the light of the general theme of the book. From our study so far, one could say that the book of Tobit is out to inculcate the truth that the most important thing in this life is to put full confidence in God, seeing in all things his benevolent Providence, and accepting from his hand with trusting resignation both property and misfortune. This is what the main characters, Tobit and Sarah, represent in the narrative.

¹⁸ Azarias meaning Yahweh has helped is son of Hananiah meaning Yahweh is merciful. That Raphael (Yahweh heals) takes the name Yahweh helps and is the "son of Yahweh is merciful" is true, but not in the way that Tobit understands it.

¹⁹ Tob 1:13; 17: 5-4; 6:14; 19: 7-9; 8:2; 3; 9:1; 5; 11:1; 7; 12:15.

²⁰ Tob 5:14; 17:21; 22: 7; 13; 8:21; 10:11; 14:12-5.

Apart from the general outlook of the book, it develops some doctrinal issues such as the existence of a personal God called Yahweh.²¹ The book teaches more on angels, but acknowledges the existence of demons.²² It teaches that man is a creature of God and, as such, cannot afford to live like unbeliever (Tob 6:7). It teaches on the sanctity of marriage.²³ The book gives counsel almost on every page on the necessity of good works. It mentions four types of good works: prayer, burying the dead (Tob 1:20; 2:4), fasting (Tob 1:12; 3:10) and almsgiving (Tob 1:17; 2:16).²⁴

With regard to healing, the book of Tobit teaches that God's Providence watches over all things and guides the destinies of all men. God is in charge of all events of life including health or ill-health. He permits the trials and temptations of the just so as to prove his or her worth (Tob 3:21; 12:13). If the just remains faithful to him he or she will surely be delivered from the trials (sickness or an attack from demon) and finally be rewarded for his or her fidelity (Tob 3:22; 13:2). God is the Divine Healer.

In the book of Tobit, God administers healing through Raphael whose role is to bring Yahweh's healing to people. Raphael is not the healer, but Yahweh. Therefore, it is Yahweh, who is the one worthy of

²¹ The book of Tobit is thoroughly monotheistic. Yahweh is his name. He is the only God of Israel. He is omnipotent, eternal, and there is no escape from his hand (Tob 3:19; 7:14; 13:1-4).

²² Raphael represents the book's theology of angels. An angel is a *mal'ak* sent by God. He is incorporeal (Tob 12:19) and delivers God's message and intercedes for men before God (Tob 12:15). It is not a treatise on demonology. Only Asmodeus is mentioned. He killed husband of Sarah (Tob 3:10) and tormented her household (Tob 8:18); but on the final analysis was subject to God's power and the angel sent by Him (Tob 8:3; 12:14). Note that the book underscores the fact that demons have no power over all men but only over those who leave themselves open to his mastery (Tob 6:16; 17).

²³ The book of Tobit sees marriage as a holy union (Tob 8:5). It must be entered into with a clear and upright conscience (Tob 3:16; 18; 4:13). It must be approached with prayer (Tob 6:18) and its purpose is not emotional gratification, but procreation of children according to God's intervention (Tob 6:12; 8:9).

²⁴ The book teaches about how to pray with confidence. Tobit prayed in 3:1-6; Sarah in 3:11-15; Raguel and Edna in 8:15-17; Tobiah and Sarah in 8:7-8. These prayers made in private or public were answered by God as testimony to the efficacy of trustful prayer (12:8).

1) Healing and Faith

The book of Tobit highly recommends faith for the exercise of healing ministry. There can be no breakthrough either on the part of the one who exercises healing gifts or on the beneficiary without a steadfast faith in God, the Healer. Tobit is a man of faith, so he turned to God in his affliction (Tob 3:2-6) and healing (Tob 11:14-15). Sarah did the same in her affliction (Tob 3:11-15). Tobiah, who is the instrumental healer in the episode believed in God's help coming through his companion (Tob 6:5-6). All the other minor characters in the drama exercised some level of trust in God, except for the momentary doubt of Anna (Tob 2:22). Thus, faith in God is a *conditio sine qua non* for healing in the Church. No minister should attempt this ministry without it. Faith is also required of the one, who enjoys healing from God. As a matter of fact, deeper faith in God is one of the effects that healing is expected to achieve in the life of the one healed by God.²⁹ However, it must be emphasized that healing is not a reward for faith but an expressed gratuitous will of God. The amount of faith required for healing to take place is the same required of a believer to accept the Word of God and the Sacraments.³⁰

II) Healing, Prayer and Spirituality

Sequel to faith is the necessity of prayer on the part of the healing minister and the one expecting healing. The book of Tobit underscores the need to support prayers with fasting and almsgiving. Tobiah, the healing minister in the book of Tobit prayed (Tob 8:7-8); also Tobit and Sarah in their afflictions turned to God in prayer (Tob 3:2-6, 11-15). After their healings were attained they did not forget to offer thanksgiving prayers (Tob 8:15-17; 11:14-15; 13:1-23).

²⁹ "Only faith can guarantee the blessings that we hope for, or prove the existence of realities that are unseen" (Heb 11:1)...It is impossible to please God without faith, since anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and rewards those who seek him (Heb 11:6).

³⁰ The Catholic Bishops' Conference of Nigeria, *Guidelines for the healing ministry in the Catholic Church in Nigeria*, (Lagos: Catholic Secretariat of Nigeria, 1997), # 3.1

worship and praise (Tob 12:6-7). It must be mentioned that in bringing about healing to the recipients, God permits, indeed, used material things such as the fish organ to effect his purpose.²⁵

Implications for Healing Ministry Today

Before we consider the implications the book of Tobit has for healing ministry today, it is important to state clearly that healing ministry in the Church is an integral part of the mission and message of Jesus. It is the continuation of the divine assignment Jesus assumed officially when he read the passage of Isaiah 61:1-2 in the synagogue at Nazareth (Luke 4:14-21). Jesus in the N.T. continues the tradition that God is the Healer.²⁶ He sent forth his disciples with authority "to heal every disease and every infirmity" (Matt 10:1). Mark reports their success in 6:13 and Luke sees their success as evidence that the kingdom of God is near (10:9). Thus, the healing activities of Jesus and his disciples constitute the foundation upon which healing in the primitive Church is based.²⁷ It is believed that healing in the contemporary Church has no other bedrock apart from this. That being the case, the implications to be drawn from the book of Tobit must be understood in the light of Jesus' healing ministry and that of the Apostolic Church.²⁸

²⁵ The application of a "heavenly prescription" for the healing of Sarah and Tobit may be read as a subtle introduction of "sacramentals" in the O.T. In the case of Tobit, the anointing of the sick-eyes is recommended. This point may not be exaggerated bearing in mind that it is Yahweh who heals.

²⁶ Is. 35:4-6; 61:1-3; Jer 33:6; cf. Matt 11:3-6; Luke 4:18-21.

²⁷ Mark 16:17-18

²⁸ The N.T. gifts of healing are an integral part of the mission and message of our Lord Jesus, and of the early church's consciousness of their fulfillment. It must not be confused with psychiatry, or faith healing, however impressive the parallels, or however significant the light modern therapeutic practices may throw upon them. Cf. E. Andrews, "Gifts of healing" *The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible* (Abingdon Press, Nashville, 1962) p. 549.

Christian healer or miracle worker, so to say, is first and foremost a member of the Body of Christ and as such, he or she should endeavour to work within the tradition of the Church and for the well being of the faithful. Tobit, the healer is an example in this regard. He obeyed the instructions of Azarias, angel Raphael in disguise as he exorcised Asmodeus and healed Tobit's blindness (Tob 6:5; 7:16-18, 11:7-8). Like Tobit, healers are expected to be docile and faithful to the discipline which the Church has developed over the years in her ministrations of healing and needy. It would be most appropriate if today's ministers of healing avail themselves of such venerable traditions and operate accordingly. What is observable today in many quarters is an arrogant departure from tradition, a gradual relapse into superstition, or at least, a form of syncretism which cannot be justified biblically or theologically.

IV) *Healing and Demonology*

Another implication that could be drawn from the book of Tobit concerning healing ministry is putting the demons in their proper place. The book of Tobit celebrates faith in Yahweh and his providential care. It does not give precedence to the existence of demons (Asmodeus) whose name occurs only twice in the whole book.³⁴ Of course, the book acknowledges the existence of demons and their power over people and the material (Tob 3:8; 6:14-15); it believes that the power of demon is limited by divine providence (Tob 6:16; 8:3). This is an area where some acclaimed healers mislead. In carrying out their ministry, they lead their followers to having obsessive fear of the devil because they see demons where there is none. Rather than proclaiming God's providence, his omnipotence and omniscience, they are preoccupied with naming demons and giving undue attention to their diabolical interventions. Just as Raphael cautions Tobiah about power of Asmodeus and assures him victory through God's intervention (Tob 6:16), our Christian faith cautions against undue preoccupation with the devil. Even though evil exist in the

³⁴ Tob 3:8, 14

In his commentary on the book of Tobit, Cyprian of Carthage said that angel Raphael taught Tobit the value of almsgiving when added to prayer. Cyprian's reflection is instructive to all healing ministers today as they minister to the need of God's people. They should remember that "our prayer and fasting are of less avail unless they are added by almsgiving; that entreaties alone are of little force to attain what they seek, unless they be made sufficient by the addition of deeds and good works."³¹ This, in our humble opinion, is exactly what is lacking in many who are involved in "spiritual clinics" today. They seem to have substituted profound spirituality for credulity and for extrinsic emotional fascination.

III) *Healing and Ecclesial Community*

As St. Paul teaches, healing is a gift of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 12:4-11, 28). Like every other gift of the Spirit, healing or miraculous gifts are given to individuals within the Church for the good of the community (1 Cor. 12:7). They are not given to individuals for the purpose of self-aggrandizement or self-enrichment. Thomas Aquinas would say the charism is given *gratis* or *gratia data* meaning gift given freely for the sake of the community. Thus, those who possess healing or miraculous gifts are to use their gifts for the benefit of their ecclesial community. They should see themselves as exercising their charism within the context of the Church's healing ministry, not outside it. They are ministers in the Church and not independent agents.³²

It follows from here that gift of healing gift Church cannot and must not be exercised arbitrarily without due reference to the constituted Church Authority, in this case, the local ordinary, who has the responsibility to discern and recognize the charism and to guide the individual ministers to discern and recognize the charism and to guide the individual minister of healing that come under their jurisdiction.³³ A

³¹ Cf. *De opere et eleemosynis* 5 of St. Cyprian.

³² CBCN, *ibid.* # 2.8

³³ Vatican II, *Lumen Gentium*, n. 12; CBCN, *ibid.* # 4.2 a-d; cf. 1 Thess 5:17; 1 Cor 14:12-40; 1 Thess 5:12; 1 Cor 12:28.

universe, God is mightier than the devil and he is able to turn everything, including evil, to good for those who love him (Rom 8:28).

V) Healing and Healers' Attitude

The final implication we wish to draw from the book of Tobit on healing ministry today concerns the attitude of healing ministers to praise and material gifts. Raphael, in the book of Tobit, is on mission for God. He is sent to heal God's faithful people in affliction. He carries out his mission humbly, honestly and gently. He does not draw attention to himself, but to the divine presence. Raphael does not arrogate to himself honor and praise due to God. Rather than allowing Tobit and Tobiah to lavish gifts on him on account of a job well done, Raphael takes both aside for his final instruction in the book saying "Bless God, utter his praise before all the living for the favor he has shown you. Bless and extol his name proclaiming before all people the deeds of God as they deserve, and never be tired of giving. As regards detachment, we have examples that ministers of God, particularly, those involved in healing ministry should emulate."³⁵

Conclusion

We are confident to describe the book of Tobit as an attempt to dramatize the deuteronomist notion of retribution, which allows for the testing of faithful Israelites. This type of didactic story is also found in the book of Job. In Tobit, all the major characters—Tobit, Anna and their son, Tobiah, Raguel, Edna and Sarah their only daughter—all observed the Law of Yahweh and enjoyed the blessings of good health and prosperity until misfortune struck them. Consequently, Tobit and Sarah prayed for death when they faced their lives' misery, but the faithful God of Israel would

³⁵ CBCN, Ibid. # 4.4; We do not suggest that receiving gifts from beneficiaries of our ministry is ipso facto evil; rather we are advocating caution in the reception of such for they have the tendency of making us feel that we and not God are the healers. There is the danger of corrupting the minister. Cf. 2 Kings 5:20-27.

not allow the just to languish forever in misery. He sent angel Raphael to bring them divine help. This is the turning point in the narrative and its message, namely that God favors and blesses the faithful people no matter the delay.

The book of Tobit, apart from teaching the values of family life and religious fidelity with emphasis on human health and wholeness, has great influence on the Christian understanding of marriage. Right from the period of the Middle Ages to the post-Vatican II era, Raguel's blessing on Tobiah and Sarah in Tob 8:15-17 has been part of liturgical nuptial blessing. Thus, even till today, passages of Tobit are favorite passages read at wedding celebration.³⁶ It teaches today's readers that fidelity to the Law of Yahweh is the source of health, healing, wholeness and material prosperity. It is a faith-book that Charismatics and Christians seeking the right approaches to healing and health in the Church today must read.



³⁶ Tob 7-9-15: The story of the wedding of Tobiah and Sarah. Tob 8:5-7: Tobiah and Sarah's prayer on the wedding night. Both are good models for married couples today.