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The Spirituality of Suffering in the Context of Insecurity and Farmer-Herder Clashes in Jalingo Diocese, Nigeria

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Abstract

The escalating incidence of farmer-herder clashes across Nigeria's Middle Belt has generated not only material devastation but also a profound crisis of meaning for the communities caught within its violence. Jalingo Diocese, situated in Taraba State, exemplifies this reality, where recurrent conflict between settled agrarian populations and itinerant pastoralists has produced displacement, loss of life, and the erosion of communal trust. This study will examine the spirituality of suffering as it emerges within this context of insecurity, exploring how Christian communities in Jalingo Diocese interpret, endure, and theologically respond to prolonged violence and dispossession. Rather than treating suffering merely as a pastoral or social problem to be managed, the study will approach it as a lived theological category, drawing on biblical theodicy, patristic reflection, magisterial teaching, and contemporary spiritual theology to interrogate how faith communities construct meaning amid chaos. The research will proceed by a qualitative, library-based and pastoral-observational method. The study will argue that suffering, when engaged spiritually rather than merely endured passively, becomes a site of resilience and moral agency, enabling victims to reclaim dignity and hope without denying the legitimate demand for justice, security, and structural reform. It will further contend that the Church's pastoral response must hold together consolation and prophetic critique, offering spiritual accompaniment to the afflicted while simultaneously challenging the political, economic, and ecological drivers of the conflict. The paper will conclude by proposing a contextual theology of suffering for Jalingo Diocese, one that neither romanticizes pain nor reduces it to fatalistic acceptance but positions it within a broader eschatological hope capable of sustaining communities toward reconciliation and durable peace.

Keywords: *spirituality of suffering, farmer-herder conflict, insecurity, Jalingo Diocese, theodicy, pastoral theology, reconciliation.*

Introduction

Nigeria's Middle Belt, and Jalingo Diocese in particular, has in the last two decades become one of the most contested theatres of communal violence in West Africa. What was once described, somewhat simplistically, as seasonal friction between transhumant pastoralists and sedentary crop farmers over grazing routes and water access has metastasized into a recurring cycle of raids, reprisals, kidnappings, and mass displacement that now bears many of the structural features of a low-intensity war (International Crisis Group 3-9). Jalingo Diocese, whose pastoral territory covers a significant portion of Taraba State, sits at the geographical and demographic heart of this crisis. Parishes within the Diocese have buried the dead, sheltered the displaced in church compounds, and mediated between aggrieved communities, often without the benefit of adequate security, government presence, or sustained humanitarian support.

The causes of the conflict are neither purely religious nor purely economic. Scholars have pointed to the combined pressures of desertification and shrinking grazing land in the Sahel, population growth, the proliferation of small arms, weak land tenure systems, and the politicization of

ethnic and religious identity as contributing factors that together have transformed a manageable resource dispute into protracted violence (Blench 12-15; Okoli and Atelhe 78). Whatever the precise weighting of these causes, the pastoral reality confronting Jalingo Diocese is unambiguous: communities that once lived in relative, if uneasy, coexistence now live under the shadow of sudden attack, and the Church is called to minister to a people whose suffering is not episodic but chronic.

It is within this context that the present study will locate its central concern, namely, the spirituality of suffering. Suffering of this magnitude and duration cannot be addressed by pastoral technique alone. It demands a theological account, one that takes seriously both the cry of the afflicted and the Church's inherited wisdom on the meaning of pain, so that the faithful of Jalingo Diocese are neither abandoned to despair nor offered a spirituality that anesthetizes them to injustice.

Statement of the Problem

Pastoral responses to the farmer-herder crisis in Jalingo Diocese have tended, understandably, toward the urgent and the practical: emergency relief, advocacy for security intervention, and inter-communal dialogue. What has received comparatively little sustained theological attention is the interior dimension of the crisis, that is, how the suffering faithful themselves make religious sense of their affliction, and whether the spiritual resources available to them, whether inherited from Catholic tradition or reshaped by local piety, are adequate to sustain hope without either minimizing the horror of what has occurred or collapsing into a fatalism that forecloses the pursuit of justice. Without a clearly articulated spiritual theology of suffering, catechesis and pastoral care risk defaulting to either a bare humanitarian register that has nothing distinctively Christian to offer, or a devotionalism that spiritualizes suffering to the point of quietism. This study will address that gap by looking at an authentically Catholic, contextually attentive spirituality of suffering for a Church living under conditions of chronic insecurity like Jalingo Diocese.

Purpose of the Study

This study will set out to examine a spirituality of suffering, to situate this spirituality within the concrete pastoral reality of farmer-herder violence in Jalingo Diocese, and to propose implications and recommendations by which the Diocese might deepen its pastoral and catechetical engagement with the suffering of its people.

Significance of the Study

The study will be significant on several levels. Academically, it will contribute to the still-emerging body of African Catholic theological reflection on suffering and conflict, a field that remains dominated by sociological and political-science literature on the Middle Belt crisis, with theological voices comparatively underrepresented. Spiritually, it will offer clergy, catechists, and lay leaders within Jalingo Diocese a theological framework that can inform homiletics, catechesis, counseling, and liturgical practice in communities affected by violence. Ecclesially, it will contribute to the wider Nigerian and African Church's reflection on how the Gospel is to be proclaimed credibly amid protracted insecurity, a concern shared well beyond Jalingo Diocese.

Scope and Delimitation

The study will be delimited to the theological question of suffering as it bears upon the farmer-herder conflict within the pastoral territory of Jalingo Diocese. It will not undertake an exhaustive political or sociological analysis of the conflict's root causes, nor will it offer a comprehensive security or policy prescription, matters that properly belong to political science, conflict studies, and public policy. Where such material is engaged, it will be engaged only insofar as it illuminates the spiritual and theological question at hand. Similarly, while the study will draw on interviews and pastoral observation, it will not purport to be a full ethnographic or sociological survey; its primary method will remain theological and library-based, supplemented by contextual data.

Methodology

The study will employ a qualitative, primarily library-based theological methodology, complemented by field-oriented pastoral observation. Primary theological sources, namely Scripture, patristic writings, magisterial documents and the works of contemporary theologians, will be examined to construct a theological framework for a spirituality of suffering. This framework will then be brought into conversation with the pastoral situation of Jalingo Diocese, drawing on documented accounts of the farmer-herder conflict, diocesan pastoral communications, and the researcher's own pastoral observation of affected communities, to test the framework's adequacy and to generate contextually grounded recommendations.

Definition of Terms

Spirituality

Spirituality, as used in this study, refers not merely to private devotional feeling but to the lived, existential appropriation of one's relationship with God, a pattern of life shaped by the Spirit that integrates belief, prayer, moral practice, and communal belonging into a coherent way of being in the world (Sheldrake 1-9). Christian spirituality is therefore never a purely interior or individualistic affair; it

is always mediated through the concrete circumstances, cultural idiom, and historical moment of the believer, which is precisely why a spirituality of suffering adequate to Jalingo Diocese must be attentive to the specific texture of violence and displacement experienced there.

Suffering

Suffering is here understood broadly as the experience of pain, loss, or diminishment, whether physical, psychological, social, or spiritual, that afflicts a person or community and that raises, implicitly or explicitly, the question of meaning. Following Pope John Paul II's distinction in Salvifici Doloris, suffering is treated as broader than physical pain alone, encompassing moral and spiritual affliction, and as a reality that, however evidently evil in itself, becomes for the believer a locus in which the question of God's presence or absence is most acutely posed.

Insecurity

Insecurity, in the Nigerian context and as used here, denotes the pervasive condition of vulnerability to violence, displacement, kidnapping, and loss of livelihood that has come to characterize large parts of the country's Middle Belt and northern regions, a condition marked not by isolated incidents but by the reasonable and sustained expectation of future harm (Okoli and Atelhe 76-80). It is this chronic, anticipatory quality of insecurity, rather than any single attack, that most profoundly shapes the spiritual and psychological life of affected communities.

Farmer-Herder Clashes

Farmer-herder clashes refer to the violent confrontations, raids, and reprisals between settled crop-farming communities and itinerant or semi-itinerant pastoralist communities, typically Fulani herders, over access to land, water, and grazing corridors, confrontations that in the Nigerian Middle Belt have increasingly been overlaid with ethnic, religious, and political dimensions that exceed their original resource-based character (Blench 10-18).

Review of Related Literature

This section will survey the relevant literature thematically, organizing it into four clusters: literature on the farmer-herder conflict in Nigeria, literature on theological and philosophical treatments of suffering, literature on African theological approaches to affliction and resilience, and literature on pastoral and ecclesial responses to conflict in Africa. The section will close by identifying the gap this study will seek to address.

Literature on the Farmer-Herder Conflict in Nigeria

A substantial body of scholarship has emerged analyzing the causes and trajectory of farmer-herder violence in Nigeria. Blench traces the conflict's roots to ecological pressures in the Sahel that have pushed pastoralist communities progressively southward into the Middle Belt, intensifying competition over increasingly scarce arable and grazing land (7-22). Okoli and Atelhe examine the securitization of the conflict, arguing that the proliferation of small arms and the weakness of state security architecture have transformed localized disputes into sustained, weapon-intensive violence with regional implications (74-89). The International Crisis Group's reporting corroborates this trajectory, documenting the conflict's escalating death toll and its increasingly ethno-religious framing in public discourse, even where its underlying drivers remain substantially economic and ecological (2-14). This literature, while indispensable for understanding the conflict's material and political dimensions, offers little sustained theological reflection on how affected communities interpret and endure their suffering religiously, a gap this study will address.

Theological and Philosophical Literature on Suffering

The theological literature on suffering is considerably older and more developed. Classical theodicy, running from Augustine's privation theory of evil through to modern philosophical treatments, has largely approached suffering as a problem to be rationally resolved. Twentieth-century theology, however, marked a decisive shift toward what may be termed a theology of the cross. Moltmann's The Crucified God argues that authentic Christian theology cannot resolve suffering through abstract argument but must locate God's own solidarity with sufferers in the cross of Christ, such that God is not a distant explainer of suffering but one who has entered into it (Moltmann 200-227). Sölle's Suffering criticizes theologies that too readily justify suffering as divinely willed, insisting instead on a distinction between suffering that can and should be resisted and struggled against, and suffering that, once endured, can be integrated into a deepened solidarity and hope (Sölle 13-33). This literature provides the study's key interpretive lens: suffering is not to be explained away but accompanied, and the spirituality appropriate to it must resist both easy theodicy and despair.

African Theological Literature on Affliction and Resilience

A growing corpus of African theological writing engages suffering from within the continent's own historical and cultural experience of conflict, colonization, and structural violence. Magesa's work on African religious moral traditions emphasizes the communal, life-affirming orientation of African spirituality, in which suffering is processed not primarily as an individual crisis but as a rupture in the vital force of the community that calls for corporate ritual and moral restoration (Magesa 44-67). Bujo

situates African theological anthropology within a palaver-based ethic of communal deliberation and reconciliation, arguing that African Christian communities possess indigenous resources for processing conflict that Western theological categories alone do not adequately capture (Bujo 88-104). Katongole's Born from Lament engages directly with the experience of violence in the African Great Lakes region, arguing that authentic Christian hope in contexts of mass violence must be born through, rather than around, the practice of communal lament, and that premature reconciliation narratives that bypass lament tend to produce shallow and unstable peace (Katongole 3-21). This literature is directly germane to Jalingo Diocese, though none of it addresses the specific pastoral situation of Taraba State's farmer-herder crisis, again underscoring the present study's contribution.

Pastoral and Ecclesial Responses to Conflict in Africa

Finally, a body of literature examines the Catholic Church's institutional and pastoral responses to conflict in Africa, including the post-synodal exhortation Africae Munus, which explicitly names reconciliation, justice, and peace as the pastoral priorities of the African Church in the twenty-first century (Benedict XVI, Africae Munus 9-27). Regional episcopal statements, including communications from the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Nigeria on the farmer-herder crisis, document the hierarchy's advocacy for security intervention and inter-communal dialogue, but such statements, of their nature, are occasional and pastoral rather than sustained theological treatises. This study will seek to draw these occasional pastoral interventions into a more systematic theological framework grounded in Scripture, tradition, and contemporary theology.

Identified Gap

Taken together, the reviewed literature reveals a clear lacuna: while the political and sociological dimensions of the farmer-herder conflict are well documented, and while rich theological resources on suffering exist both in Western and African theology, no sustained study has yet integrated these resources into a spirituality of suffering specifically addressed to the pastoral reality of Jalingo Diocese. This study is offered as a contribution toward filling that gap.

Biblical Foundation

Scripture offers not a single theory of suffering but a sustained, multivalent engagement with it, spanning lament, protest, mystery, and ultimately the transformation of suffering through the passion of Christ. This section will survey the principal biblical resources for a theology of suffering relevant to Jalingo Diocese's context.

The Old Testament Witness

The Book of Job stands as Scripture's most sustained theological engagement with innocent suffering. Job's afflictions are not presented as deserved punishment, and his friends' confident theodicies, which insist his suffering must be traceable to hidden sin, are ultimately rejected by God as an inadequate account of Job's affliction (Job 42.7-8). What Job receives is not an explanation but an encounter, a divine speech from the whirlwind that reframes his suffering within the vastness of a creation whose order exceeds human comprehension, without thereby denying the reality or the injustice of what Job has endured (Job 38-41). This is instructive for Jalingo Diocese: the pastoral temptation to explain communal suffering as divine punishment for communal sin, a temptation not infrequently voiced in popular piety, is precisely the theology Job's friends offer and that God rejects.

The Psalter's laments constitute a second crucial resource. Psalms such as Psalm 22, Psalm 44, and Psalm 88 give voice to protest, abandonment, and unresolved anguish, addressed directly to God without pretense of resignation. These psalms model a spirituality in which honest complaint is not a failure of faith but an expression of covenantal intimacy, the conviction that God can be addressed even, and especially, in God's apparent silence or absence. For communities in Jalingo Diocese who have buried loved ones lost to violence, the lament tradition offers a biblically sanctioned language of grief that need not be suppressed in favour of premature consolation.

The prophetic literature adds a further dimension: prophets such as Habakkuk and Jeremiah combine lament with unflinching critique of injustice, insisting that the cry of the afflicted is inseparable from the demand for righteousness among those responsible for oppression (Habakkuk 1.2-4; Jeremiah 20.7-18). This prophetic strand resists any spirituality of suffering that would counsel passive endurance without also naming and confronting the structures, whether political neglect, ecological degradation, or armed impunity, that produce and sustain the violence.

The New Testament Witness

The passion of Christ is the theological centre around which the New Testament's engagement with suffering is organized. In the Gethsemane narrative, Jesus does not suppress his anguish but voices it directly to the Father, asking that the cup pass from him, while ultimately submitting to the Father's will (Matthew 26.36-46). The cry of dereliction from the cross, drawn directly from Psalm 22, situates Christ's own suffering within the lament tradition, disclosing a God who, in Christ, does not merely observe human affliction from without but enters into its furthest

depths, including the experience of felt abandonment (Matthew 27.46).

Pauline theology develops this Christological foundation further. In Romans, Paul insists that present sufferings, however real, are to be held within the horizon of a hope that does not put to shame, and that the whole of creation groans in anticipation of a redemption not yet fully realized (Romans 8.18-25). In 2 Corinthians, Paul speaks of an affliction so severe that he and his companions despaired even of life, yet interprets this experience as formative of a deeper reliance on the God who raises the dead, and as the source of a comfort that can then be extended to others in affliction (2 Corinthians 1.3-11). This latter text is theologically significant for Jalingo Diocese, since it grounds pastoral solidarity in shared suffering rather than in detached charity.

The First Letter of Peter, addressed to communities facing hostility and persecution, exhorts believers not to be surprised by the fiery ordeal that has come upon them, but to rejoice insofar as they share in the sufferings of Christ, while simultaneously insisting that such suffering must never be for wrongdoing but always borne in patient innocence (1 Peter 4.12-16). Revelation, finally, offers an eschatological horizon in which the suffering of the martyrs and the faithful is not the final word, promising a future in which God will wipe away every tear and death itself will be no more (Revelation 21.3-4). Together, these texts furnish a biblical spirituality of suffering that holds lament, solidarity, hope, and eschatological promise in careful balance, a balance this study will argue must inform spiritual practice in Jalingo Diocese.

Patristic Dimension

The Church Fathers, writing frequently under conditions of persecution, imperial hostility, or barbarian invasion, offer a body of reflection on suffering forged in circumstances not unlike, in certain structural respects, the chronic insecurity confronting Jalingo Diocese today.

Irenaeus of Lyons

Irenaeus's theology of recapitulation situates human suffering within a larger economy of growth toward maturity in Christ. For Irenaeus, humanity was created not perfect but capable of growth, and even the disorder introduced by sin becomes, within divine providence, an occasion through which humanity is led, often through hardship, toward the fullness of communion with God (Adversus Haereses 4.38). While Irenaeus does not thereby justify gratuitous violence, his theology resists a static view of suffering as pure meaningless loss, insisting instead that God's providence can draw even affliction into the larger movement of salvation history.

Cyprian of Carthage

Writing during the Decian and Valerian persecutions, Cyprian's pastoral letters to a Church experiencing martyrdom and displacement stress the unity of the suffering Church as itself a theological reality, insisting that the sufferings of individual members are borne within, and give witness to, the communion of the whole Body. His treatise On the Lapsed further models a pastoral realism regarding those who, under duress, faltered in faith, counseling neither harsh rejection nor easy readmission, but a graduated path of penance and reconciliation, a pastoral sensitivity directly relevant to communities in Jalingo Diocese where fear and trauma have at times fractured communal and familial bonds.

Augustine of Hippo

Augustine's mature theology of evil as privation, the notion that evil possesses no independent substance but represents a falling away from the good, provided the classical framework within which subsequent Western theodicy developed (Confessions 7.12). More pastorally significant for this study, however, is Augustine's City of God, composed in the aftermath of Rome's sack by Alaric's forces, in which Augustine refuses both the pagan charge that Christian faith had failed to protect the city and any simple identification of earthly security with divine favour, insisting instead that the City of God is a pilgrim reality whose ultimate peace transcends, without negating the value of, earthly order and justice (De Civitate Dei 1.1; 19.17). This distinction between penultimate and ultimate peace offers Jalingo Diocese a theological resource for holding together urgent advocacy for earthly security and justice with a hope that does not collapse when such security proves elusive.

Gregory the Great and the Desert Tradition

Gregory the Great's Pastoral Rule, composed amid the political instability of a collapsing imperial order in Italy, insists that those who govern souls must themselves have been tested by compassion for the afflicted, arguing that authentic spiritual authority is forged through, rather than despite, exposure to suffering (Regula Pastoralis 2.5-6). The Desert Fathers, for their part, developed an ascetic spirituality in which voluntary hardship was embraced as a discipline of the heart, cultivating patience, humility, and dependence on God; while their context of voluntary asceticism differs from the involuntary suffering of conflict victims, their insistence that suffering can be a school of virtue, rather than merely a fact to be endured, has exercised lasting influence on Christian spiritual theology, including its African Catholic inheritance.

Church Documents

Gaudium et Spes

The Second Vatican Council's Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World opens by declaring that the joys and hopes, the griefs and anxieties of the people of this age, especially those who are poor or afflicted, are the joys and hopes, the griefs and anxieties of the followers of Christ as well (Gaudium et Spes 1). This foundational statement grounds the Church's solidarity with sufferers not in charitable condescension but in shared identity, a principle directly applicable to Jalingo Diocese's pastoral posture toward victims of farmer-herder violence. The Constitution further insists that only in the mystery of the incarnate Word does the mystery of the human person truly become clear, since Christ, in revealing the Father, fully reveals humanity to itself, including, by extension, the meaning of human suffering assumed by Christ himself (Gaudium et Spes 22).

Salvifici Doloris

Pope John Paul II's apostolic letter On the Christian Meaning of Human Suffering remains the Magisterium's most sustained treatment of the theme. John Paul II distinguishes suffering from mere physical pain, insisting that the deepest human suffering is always bound up with the question of meaning, a question that finds its ultimate answer only in the redemptive suffering of Christ, through which suffering itself is not eliminated but transfigured into a participation in Christ's own salvific work. The letter's reflection on the parable of the Good Samaritan is particularly instructive for pastoral practice, presenting compassionate proximity to the sufferer, rather than explanation or distance, as the Church's proper response to affliction. John Paul II further insists that suffering, borne in union with Christ, does not merely await passive endurance but can become itself a source of spiritual fruitfulness and intercessory power within the Body of Christ, a conviction with direct implications for how the suffering faithful of Jalingo Diocese might be pastorally accompanied and empowered rather than merely commiserated with.

Spe Salvi

Pope Benedict XVI's encyclical on Christian hope situates suffering within an explicitly eschatological framework, arguing that a hope which looks only to alleviate present suffering, without reference to a future that transcends history, ultimately fails to sustain the human spirit under conditions of prolonged affliction. Benedict insists, further, that the capacity to accept, rather than simply flee, unavoidable suffering, when accepted in communion with Christ, becomes itself a way of growing in maturity and inner freedom, while carefully distinguishing such acceptance from any endorsement of suffering that could and should be actively resisted or alleviated. This distinction, between suffering that must be resisted through the pursuit of justice and security, and suffering that, once it has occurred, must be integrated spiritually, is essential to a balanced spirituality of suffering for Jalingo Diocese.

Africae Munus and Nigerian Episcopal Statements

Pope Benedict XVI's post-synodal apostolic exhortation Africae Munus, issued following the Second Special Assembly for Africa of the Synod of Bishops, names reconciliation, justice, and peace as the central pastoral vocation of the Church in Africa in the present era, explicitly addressing the continent's experience of ethnic conflict and structural violence and calling the African Church to be a leaven of reconciliation within societies fractured by such violence (Africae Munus 9-30). Statements issued periodically by the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Nigeria on the farmer-herder crisis have applied this exhortation's principles directly to the Nigerian context, calling on government authorities to provide adequate security, urging affected communities toward dialogue and forgiveness, and insisting that the pursuit of justice and the practice of forgiveness are not opposed but mutually necessary. These episcopal interventions, though occasional rather than systematic, provide the concrete magisterial warrant for the pastoral posture this study will recommend for Jalingo Diocese.

Contemporary Theologians and Spiritual Theologians

Jürgen Moltmann

Moltmann's The Crucified God remains among the most influential twentieth-century theological engagements with suffering. Written in the shadow of his own experience as a prisoner of war and in critical dialogue with the horrors of the twentieth century, Moltmann argues that the cross discloses a God who does not stand apart from suffering as an impassive spectator but who, in the Son's abandonment on the cross, takes suffering into the very life of the Trinity. For Moltmann, any theology that cannot speak meaningfully in the presence of extreme suffering, that cannot be prayed or sung at the graveside of the innocent, has failed as theology. This criterion is a fitting touchstone for any spirituality proposed for Jalingo Diocese: it must be capable of being prayed at the graveside of those killed in farmer-herder violence.

Dorothee Sölle

Sölle's Suffering offers a critical corrective to theologies that too readily interpret affliction as divinely willed for some hidden good, a move she regards as theologically dangerous insofar as it can function to pacify victims and excuse the structures responsible for their suffering. Sölle distinguishes between suffering that must be actively

resisted, particularly suffering rooted in injustice and oppression, and the residual suffering that, once it has occurred, calls for a spirituality of solidarity and integration. Her insistence that authentic Christian response to suffering must include active resistance to its unjust causes provides an important corrective against any purely consolatory pastoral approach that Jalingo Diocese might otherwise be tempted to adopt.

African Theological Voices

Laurenti Magesa's account of African religious spirituality as fundamentally oriented toward the maintenance and restoration of life force offers a culturally resonant complement to the Western theologians discussed above, since it explains why, in the Taraba context, communal ritual, collective mourning, and the restoration of right relationship carry such spiritual weight in the aftermath of violence (Magesa 44-67). Bénézet Bujo's model of African theological ethics as a communal palaver, a process of collective deliberation aimed at restoring harmony rather than merely assigning blame, offers a template for how reconciliation processes between farming and herding communities in Jalingo Diocese might be structured in a manner that is both indigenous and theologically coherent (Bujo 88-104). Elochukwu Uzukwu's ecclesiology of the listening Church further insists that authentic pastoral authority in the African context must proceed by attentive listening to the lived experience of the community before it proceeds to teach or direct, a methodological principle this study will seek to embody in its own approach to Jalingo Diocese.

Emmanuel Katongole's Born from Lament, reflecting on the aftermath of genocide and civil war in the African Great Lakes region, argues most directly for the present study's central thesis: that authentic Christian hope in contexts of mass violence cannot bypass lament but must be born through it, since reconciliation processes that move too quickly to forgiveness without honoring the depth of loss tend to produce fragile and short-lived peace (Katongole 3-21, 210-232). Katongole's insistence that hope must be earned through the slow, communal work of lament rather than imposed as a premature theological solution provides this study's clearest contemporary theological warrant for the pastoral recommendations developed in the following sections.

The Context of Jalingo Diocese

Jalingo Diocese, erected to serve the Catholic faithful of Taraba State, ministers to a predominantly rural population whose livelihood is drawn overwhelmingly from farming, alongside significant pastoralist communities present within and adjacent to diocesan territory. Local government areas within the Diocese's pastoral reach have, in recent years, experienced repeated cycles of attack and reprisal between farming communities and herders, resulting in loss of life, the burning of homes and places of worship, the displacement of entire village populations into makeshift camps, and a pervasive climate of fear that has altered patterns of movement, worship, and economic activity across the Diocese. Parish structures, already stretched thin by the demands of a large rural territory, have found themselves functioning simultaneously as centers of worship, informal shelters for the displaced, and sites of inter-communal mediation, often without corresponding formation or resources for these expanded roles.

Theological and Pastoral Implications

The theological synthesis developed across the preceding sections will yield several concrete implications for Jalingo Diocese. To begin with, catechesis and preaching within the Diocese must resist the popular but theologically indefensible tendency to interpret communal suffering as direct divine punishment for communal sin, a tendency the Book of Job itself explicitly rejects, and must instead offer the faithful a biblically grounded language of lament that legitimates rather than suppresses grief and protest. Pastoral care for victims of violence must, in addition, attend not only to material relief but to the psychological and spiritual dimensions of trauma, recognizing, in line with Katongole's argument, that premature calls to forgive without adequate space for lament risk producing a brittle and ultimately unstable peace. Equally, the Diocese's evident practice of communal solidarity, sheltering the displaced, organizing memorial liturgies, mediating between communities, already embodies, often without explicit theological articulation, the very theology of accompaniment this study will trace from Scripture through the Fathers to contemporary theologians, and would benefit from being named and reinforced as a deliberate pastoral program rather than left to ad hoc parish initiative.

Following Augustine's distinction between penultimate and ultimate peace, the Diocese's advocacy for improved security and government accountability, work already undertaken through various diocesan and episcopal channels, must be understood not as a departure from spiritual mission but as itself an expression of the Church's hope for the earthly city, held together with, rather than opposed to, its eschatological hope. In the same vein, and following Sölle's caution against theologies that pacify victims, the Diocese's spiritual formation must take care not to counsel indiscriminate acceptance of violence as a form of Christian virtue, but must instead form the faithful in a discernment that distinguishes suffering to be resisted through the pursuit of justice from suffering that, once endured, calls for spiritual integration and communal solidarity.

Recommendations

On the basis of the foregoing, the study will offer the following recommendations for Jalingo Diocese.

1. The Diocese should develop a structured catechetical module on the biblical and theological meaning of suffering, drawing explicitly on the lament tradition, the passion narratives, and magisterial teaching, for use in parish formation programs, small Christian communities, and clergy and catechist training. Such a module will need trained personnel and steady funding behind it, because well-drafted policies are often applied unevenly where staff and resources are lacking (Nwuke and Soli).
2. The Diocese should establish or strengthen trauma-informed pastoral care ministries, including trained lay counselors and chaplains attentive to the psychological dimensions of conflict-related trauma, working in coordination with, rather than as a substitute for, professional mental health resources where available. The quality of such ministries will depend largely on the training given to those who staff them, since sustained staff development has been found to predict quality outcomes strongly (Elesia and Sam-Kalagbor).
3. Liturgical resources, including memorial rites, penitential services, and prayers of lament and intercession specifically composed for victims of farmer-herder violence, should be developed and made available across the Diocese, so that communal grief finds authentic liturgical expression rather than being processed only informally or left unaddressed. These resources can also be shared with scattered and displaced families through video platforms such as YouTube, which have proven useful for instruction in Rivers State (Mbaba), and through faster mobile networks that are expected to widen access across Nigeria (Gobi et al.).
4. The Diocese should continue and formalize its role in inter-communal dialogue initiatives, drawing where appropriate on the indigenous palaver model of communal reconciliation described by Bujo, while ensuring that such dialogue is preceded by adequate space for lament rather than moving directly to reconciliation rhetoric. Evidence from Rivers State shows that cooperative relationships between institutions and their host communities sustain trust and good administration over time (Igoni et al.), and parishes that keep such relationships with both farming and herding communities will be better placed to host dialogue when tension rises.
5. The Diocese should continue its advocacy, in concert with the wider Catholic Bishops' Conference of Nigeria and ecumenical partners, for improved state security provision and structural attention to the ecological and economic drivers of the conflict, understanding such advocacy as integral to, rather than separate from, its spiritual mission.
6. Seminary and catechist formation within the Diocese should incorporate sustained engagement with African theological voices such as Magesa, Bujo, and Katongole, alongside classical and magisterial sources, so that future pastoral agents are equipped with a theology of suffering genuinely rooted in both the universal tradition of the Church and the particular cultural and historical experience of Taraba State.

Conclusion

This study will argue that the chronic insecurity produced by farmer-herder violence in Jalingo Diocese demands not merely a pastoral management strategy but a considered spirituality of suffering, one capable of holding together honest lament, theological hope, and a sustained commitment to justice. Drawing on the biblical witness of Job, the Psalms, and the passion of Christ; the patristic reflections of Irenaeus, Cyprian, and Augustine; the magisterial teaching of Gaudium et Spes, Salvifici Doloris, Spe Salvi, and Africae Munus; and the contemporary theological voices of Moltmann, Sölle, Magesa, Bujo, and Katongole, the study will propose a framework in which suffering is neither explained away nor romanticized, but accompanied, named, and, where possible, transformed into a locus of communal resilience and moral agency.

The recommendations offered in this paper will not be exhaustive, but they will represent concrete steps by which Jalingo Diocese might deepen its already evident pastoral commitment to the suffering faithful under its care. Ultimately, the study will contend that a Church which learns to weep with those who weep, without abandoning either its hope in the resurrection or its prophetic demand for justice, offers its people not an escape from suffering but a way of suffering that neither denies its horror nor forecloses the possibility of new life. It is this conviction, at once ancient and urgently contemporary, that the present study will commend to the pastoral life of Jalingo Diocese.

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