



Displacement, Divine Protection, and Forced Migration: Re-reading Matthew 2:13-23 in Conversation with Nigeria's Internally Displaced Persons Crisis

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Abstract

The displacement of people is an acute humanitarian concern and the Nigerian situation is highly complex with wide-spread internal displacement driven by insurgency, banditry, communal violence and environmental conditions. Although there has been a great deal of research and interest in the political and humanitarian aspects of displacement, little work has been done on the theological implications of the biblical texts. This paper reconsiders the Matthew 2:13-23 text focusing on forced migration and its relevance in the context of the internally displaced persons, (IDP) crisis in Nigeria. Using historical-critical and African contextual hermeneutics, the study proposes that Matthew's description of the flight to Egypt depicts displacement as a theological experience characterized by vulnerability, God's protection, resilience, and hope. The story depicts Jesus and his family as victims of political violence forced to seek refuge, thereby offering a biblical lens to the issues of displacement today. The article uses Nigerian IDP experiences to engage Matthew's narrative, highlighting themes of divine presence, communal suffering and restoration. It also argues that the church's response must go beyond the provision of humanitarian aid to incorporate advocacy, psychological and social support and social change. The study is a contribution to migration theology in the sense that it is an attempt to provide a contextual biblical framework for the Christian response to displacement in Nigeria.

Keywords:

Displacement; Forced Migration; Internally Displaced, Persons; Migration Theology; African Contextual Hermeneutics.

Introduction

One of the major realities of the modern world is the mobility of people. International migration statistics suggest that millions of people are driven out of their homes every year because of armed conflict, political instability, lack of religious freedom, environmental problems, and economic hardship. Forced migration is not the same as voluntary migration, as it is movement that is compelled under threat, insecurity or coercion. This displacement can have deep social, psychological, economic and spiritual implications for those and those communities impacted.

Becker and Ferrara (2019) point out that forced migration often leads to long-term livelihood, identity formation, social network and community cohesion disruptions. Thus, displacement is not only a humanitarian issue, but also a great theological and moral challenge. Nigeria is one of the most extreme displacement situations in Africa. There has been significant ID across various parts of the country due to the operations of Boko Haram insurgents, armed bandits, communal conflicts, farmer-herder conflicts and environmental disasters. Research shows that millions of Nigerians have been internally displaced from their homes in the last 10 years, especially in the north-east region of the country which has been most affected by insurgency (Gwadabe et al., 2018; Omogunloye et al., 2023). IDPs often suffer from poverty, trauma, food insecurity, poor access to health services, disrupted education, and social marginalisation (Ngwu et al., 2023; Olufadewa et al., 2022). Despite the different interventions introduced by governmental authorities and humanitarian organisations, there are still a number of problems that have to be addressed when it comes to protection, rehabilitation and reintegration.

Religion in the context of displacement has garnered increasing academic interest. Religious institutions may offer displacement services such as humanitarian aid, emotional support, social networks and spiritual resources to assist with coping in times of uncertainty and suffering. Within the Nigerian context, there have been several noteworthy contributions by faith-based organisations (FBOs) in supporting IDPs through various relief, education, counselling and reintegration initiatives (Afolaranmi, 2020; Iweze, 2022). Nevertheless, the Nigerian scholarship on displacement is still relatively underdeveloped, despite the notable engagement of religious communities. There are many examples of migration, exile, displacement and seeking refuge in the Biblical stories. Movement is a major theme in the biblical narrative, from Abraham's journey from Ur to Israel's exile in Babylon, to the missionary journeys of the early church.

Recently, more scholars have posited that migration is a dominant theme in Scripture and not a side-issue in the history of the text (Estrada, 2026; Akodon, 2026). Of these migration stories, Matthew 2:13-23 is unique. This is a retelling of the story of Jesus, Mary and Joseph's flight into Egypt after Herod tries to kill Jesus. The story is about political violence, forced migration, exile, refuge and eventual return, themes that are very relevant to the current experiences of displacement. The main interpretive perspectives that have been taken on the text of Matthew 2:13–23 have been Christological themes, fulfilment quotations, Moses typology, and Matthew's use of the Old Testament (Okafor, 2008; Stargel, 2021; Viljoen, 2025). Such methods have provided useful insights, but they tend to neglect the referent of the displacement dimensions within the storyline. Some more recent scholarship has started to work on this lacuna by exploring Jesus and his family as refugees, migrants, and displaced persons (Allen, 2024; Aspray, 2023; Dube, 2019). This kind of research indicates that Matthew's Gospel contains valuable theological tools to help in the present-day migration and displacement challenges.

This article contends that Matthew 2:13–23 depicts displacement as a theological truth, one of vulnerability, divine protection, resilience and hope. The study brings Matthew's narrative into dialogue with the IDP crisis in Nigeria today, by using an African contextual hermeneutical approach. This article aims to illustrate that the biblical story of Jesus and his family offers a precedent for understanding displacement as well as a theological framework for the Christian engagement with displaced communities.

The study seeks to answer the question: What is the contribution of Matthew 2:13-23 to a theology of displacement which can shape Christian response to the IDP crisis in Nigeria? The article addresses this question by first reviewing the pertinent literature on Matthew's infancy narrative, migration theology, and Nigerian displacement studies and then proposes an African contextual hermeneutical approach to the text. Matthew 2:13–23 is analysed in the following sections and its implications for the Nigeria's current displacement realities are discussed.

Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

The theology of displacement – Matthew 2:13-23

The research on Matthew 2:13-23 has tended to focus on the Christological program and the way in which Jesus is portrayed as the fulfilment of Old Testament hopes. The works of Stargel (2021) and Viljoen (2025) point to the use of Exodus imagery and Moses typology in Matthew, claiming that the journey to Egypt is primarily a literary means of introducing Jesus as the new Moses. Likewise, Anderson (2018) highlights the importance of fulfilment quotations as a means of structuring Matthew's theology. All these methods are still relevant, but in recent years studies have increasingly turned to the migration aspects of the passage. Dube (2019) suggests that Matthew's Sondergut portrays Jesus in the context of the wider migratory and community identity formation processes of displaced people. Allen (2024) additionally shows that Jesus as a child is a symbol of vulnerability in forced migration contexts, and how the social and political landscape influences the story.

Even though there are deep theological implications of the Matthean narrative for struggles with displacement today, Aspray (2023) rejects simplistic political appropriations of the phrase "Jesus was a refugee. In a similar way, McKinney (2021) discusses the character of Mary as a refugee, and notes its pastoral relevance for present day communities of faith. As a whole, these studies show that there is an increasing awareness in the scholarly world of the theological significance of Matthew 2:13–23 for issues of displacement, vulnerability, and survival. In spite of these developments, relatively little work has systematically linked the Matthew narrative of displacement with the present-day African context, especially that of the Nigerian IDP crisis. This article aims to fill this gap.

Migration Theology and Forced Displacement

Migration theology is a growing area of current scholarship in Christology. Migration is not an isolated social issue but has become an important theme throughout Scripture and Christian tradition. Estrada (2026), notes that the motif of migration is a recurring pattern throughout the narrative of the Bible from the beginning of the book of Genesis until the end of the book of Revelation. Likewise, Hays (2021) argues that God's people are consistently depicted as mobile communities that develop their identity as a result of their experiences of movement and displacement. Theological reflections on migration often highlight themes of hospitality, belonging, exile, accompaniment by God and dignity of the human person. Casteel (2021), claims that the biblical migration stories force the churches to reconsider their moral obligations for migrants. Similarly, Magezi and Magezi (2020), advocate for more than charity but for all-inclusive and social transformation in the theological approach to migration.

Theology also has recently begun to pay attention to the importance of refugees' experiences. Both Grundy (2024) and Kerwin (2024) highlight the connections between the suffering body of refugees and the body of Christ in the church as well as the importance of the role of faith-

based organisations in supporting migrant communities. Together, these works indicate that the Christian theological tradition has a lot to offer to the issue of displacement in the modern world.

There is however little development of migration theology in many African settings, including Nigeria. While some scholars, for instance Ilo and Otu (2021), start to develop a contextual African migration theology, there are still great opportunities to develop theological engagement with the realities of migration.

Nigeria's Internally Displaced Persons Scholarships (IDPS).

The displacement situation in Nigeria has inspired a large body of scholarly works, ranging from the political science, sociology, security studies, psychology and development studies. The literature revealed that Boko Haram insurgency is one of the major causes of displacement in the North-eastern Nigeria (Gwadabe et al., 2018; Zakari, 2019). Recent findings emphasize the influence of banditry, communal violence, and environmental factors on displacement trends (Babajide et al., 2024; Oghuvbu, 2024). The multi-faceted problems of the displaced populations have been recorded by research after research. Ngwu et al. (2023) list lack of social support network, psychological distress, and difficulties in adjustment as the challenges faced by IDPs. Likewise, Olufadewa et al (2022) also indicate that the majority of young IDPs have experienced trauma, depression and emotional distress.

The contributions of religious groups are also being given a growing focus. As revealed by Afolarami (2020) and Iweze (2022), the Faith Based Organisations (FBOs) are frequently the first point of call for displaced people, offering them much needed humanitarian assistance, counselling and reintegration programmes. Yet, many of these works are descriptive and do not explicitly engage theology with the biblical text. Therefore, there is need to bridge this gap in order to reflect theologically on the issue of displacement in Nigeria, in light of biblical narratives. The aim of this study is to fill that gap by reading Matthew 2:13–23 in its context.

Methodology

This study is qualitative theological research which combines historical-critical exegesis and African contextual hermeneutics. The methodology is guided by the objective of the study which is to explore Matthew 2:13-23 in its literary and historical context as well as its applicability to the contemporary experience of the IDPs of Nigeria. The historical-critical exegesis is the basis for an understanding of the Matthean narrative in its first-century context. This is done to analyze the literary, historical, theological and inter-textual range of the text. There is a special focus on Matthew's depictions of political violence, forced migration, divine intervention, and fulfilment traditions. This type of analysis aims to discover the theological implications of the exodus to Egypt in the context of Matthew's overall narrative. The study also utilizes African contextual hermeneutics as the method of interpretation. African hermeneutics of the Bible focuses more on how biblical texts connect with lived experiences in Africa, while respecting the historical integrity of the text, permitting Scripture to speak meaningfully to lived experiences (Mojola, 2022; Chukwuka, 2022).

Contextual hermeneutics does not see the biblical narratives as past historical events, but as being able to shed light on current social problems. This can be especially relevant when studying displacement as it allows for discussion on both the Holy Family being forced to flee and the situation with IDPs in Nigeria today. The study was based on the use of the text of

Matthew 2:13-23 as a primary source and from studies that are related to Matthean studies, migration theology, African biblical interpretation, forced migration and Nigerian displacement studies. The study aims to build a theological framework that can answer both the biblical narrative and the realities of displacement today, through this interdisciplinary engagement.

Exegesis of Matthew 2:13–23

Historical and Narrative Context

Matthew 2:13–23 is part of Matthew's infancy narrative (Matthew 1–2) that introduces key theological themes that are followed throughout the Gospel. It is a passage that comes before the start of Jesus' public ministry and after the Magi had come. Herod is portrayed as a strong political leader, driven to eradicate any potential dangers, which results in violence and suffering.

Herod the Great, known for his ruthless measures and political paranoia in the past, is also the one. Matthew makes Herod out to be a leader who is not afraid to resort to violence against innocent children to establish his leadership. This circumstance of state sponsored violence is the immediate backdrop for the displacement of Jesus and his family.

Many scholars see Matthew carefully orchestrating Jesus' life to mirror important events in Israel's history (Okafor, 2008; Stargel, 2021; Viljoen, 2025). The migrations to and from Egypt, parallels Israel's descent into and exodus from Egypt. Matthew's story thus works on several levels. It tells a story of a people who were displaced in history and situates Jesus in the larger story of a people being displaced by God. It is a story of a series of revelations from God in the form of dreams. Joseph is instructed by angels about leaving, living, coming back and settling. These multiple interventions bring the notion of divine guidance to the foreground of the experience of displacement. Matthew thus portrays migration, not as an incidental, but as an event that is "in the providence of God. However, Matthew isn't sentimental about displacement. There is a genuine threat of death for the family. Their migration is due to political violence not personal preference. Hence, the text embodies many attributes commonly attributed to contemporary forced migration such as insecurity, fear, uncertainty and seeking a place of refuge.

Flight to Egypt: Displacement as Survival (Matthew 2:13–15)

It starts with a warning from an angel to Joseph: "Take the child and his mother and flee to Egypt, and stay there till I say" (Matt. 2:13). This command instantly makes displacement an issue of life or death. The family is not migrating because they have the opportunity to do so for economic or social reasons. Instead, they are forced to leave as the child would be at risk of imminent harm if they stayed. In the modern world of migration studies, often a distinction is drawn between voluntary and forced migration. Forced migration is when they are forced to move because of threats to life, security or freedom. Jesus' and his family's experience is a good match for this definition. They run away because a political authority wants to kill the child. Allen (2024) suggests that Matthew's infant Jesus exemplifies the vulnerability that is typical of migrant communities. The baby Jesus is not in control of what's going on like some of the more powerful political figures. There is no way for him to survive except through the actions of others and for God to protect him. The vulnerability is similar to that of many displaced children who continue to be disproportionately impacted by conflict and forced migration.

It is also the selection of Egypt as a destination that is important. Egypt has played a mixed role in the history of the Bible. It is a place of oppression, as well as a place of refuge. Egypt is a source of food in times of famine in the book of Genesis. In Exodus, it is place of servitude. Again, in the story of Matthew, Egypt is a place of safety. This is what Matthew emphasizes with his quotation of Hosea 11:1, "Out of Egypt I called my son. This quote is often taken as a statement of Matthew's typological reading of Israel's history. But it also has migration implications. It is as if the writer says that the displaced person is not out of God's reach for redemption. God's work goes on in foreign places. This is because recent migration theologians have highlighted that displacement may trigger a crisis of identity and belonging (Ahmadipour & Sordé-Martí, 2024). Such concerns are addressed by Matthew, in which God is active in the experience of migration. In Egypt God's protection is not given up, but Egypt is not presented as the place where God abandoned His people. Therefore, the flight narrative is important in setting up a theological lesson; displacement can be accompanied by suffering and uncertainty, but not by a lack of God.

The Massacre of the Innocents: Violence, Trauma, and Collective Suffering

(Matthew 2:16-18)

Herod's Massacre is one of the most disturbing scenes in the infancy narrative. When the Magi don't come back, Herod decrees that all males in Bethlehem and the surrounding area be killed.

This episode uncovers the structural violence that is often the root cause of displacement. That forced move of Jesus' family needs to be viewed in the broader context of political oppression. Violence results in refugees, migrants and the displaced persons. For this reason, Matthew places forced migration in the context of other systems of power and injustice. Herod's example is a case in point of the evil effects of authoritarianism. The shooting spree is a perfect example of how the different vulnerable groups are the ones who remain the victim of the political will. The same is true in the current displacement situation, in which civilians suffer the impact of armed conflicts and political instability.

Matthew chooses to interpret this tragedy with Jeremiah 31:15:

"In Ramah a voice was heard, weeping and loud lamentation; Rachel weeping for her children.

The scene of Rachel's crying is a potent one of communal mourning and collective trauma. Rachel is the symbol not only for individual grief, but also for the agonies of a whole people.

The psychological impact of forced displacement is a recurring theme in contemporary displacement studies. Displaced people often suffer from trauma, grief, anxiety, and depression (Olufadewa et al., 2022). The Matthean narrative has foreseen these realities, and recognizes the emotional toll of violence. Significantly, Matthew does not overlook suffering by trying to provide a theological explanation too quickly. Rachel's tears are permitted to persist as a reminder within the story. Her bereavement is enshrined in Scripture itself. This recognition has important pastoral implications for it affirms the experience of victims and does not discount it.

Theologically, the passage seems to say that lament is a proper response to displacement and violence. Faith doesn't remove suffering, but it gives us words to say our pain to God.

Return from Egypt: Hope, Restoration, and New Beginnings (Matthew 2:19-23)

After Herod's death, Joseph receives another message from God to go back to Israel. The return is a pivotal moment in the story. At the heart of it is the experience of displacement but this is not the end of the family's story. The return story is about themes of restoration and hope. But, Matthew is very cautious not to suggest restoration as a straightforward process of reinstating the former situation. With political risk still in the game, Joseph's family do not return to Bethlehem, but settle in Nazareth. So, restoration is adapting to new realities and not to the restoration of former circumstances. The event is a reflection on the contemporary experience of displacement. Many of the displaced people don't come back to the places they came from. Rather, they create new belonging in unknown cultures. Return is no longer considered an ultimate return but is more and more seen as a complex, partial and negotiated process.

God's direction is evident in the way back on the trip. God guides the family's departure and God guides the family to the place where they will settle. This continuity highlights one thing: the accompaniment of God in each step of displacement. Again, as in Nazareth, another important theme is introduced: resilience. In spite of the threats, displacement and the uncertainty, the family manages to survive and carry on with their mission. So Matthew tells a story of displacement not just as a story of suffering but also as a testimony to endurance. Theology research on migration in recent years has highlighted the importance of resilience as one of the aspects of the migration communities (Meiring, 2025; Fong, 2023). Matthew's account reinforces this view in that survival and adaptation are viewed as a sign of God's faithfulness and not solely of the strength of the human.

Matthew's "Emerging Theology of Displacement"

There are several theological themes in Matthew 2:13-23.

First is the fact that displacement exposes people's vulnerability. Jesus fully experiences the precariousness of being a displaced person. The Son of God starts life in peril, in precarious circumstances.

Second, Divine Protection is the theme of the story. Displacement is not prevented by God's guidance, but it is given to people when they are displaced. God is in the migration experience, not off to the side.

Third, in the passage, there is also an emphasis on resilience. Despite political violence the Holy Family continues to live. This experience shows them that losing their place doesn't mean losing their identity or losing their purpose.

Fourth, the story is one of hope. Displacement is a loss and a suffering, but Matthew offers the possibility of restoration. The hope is not in the political situation but in God's ongoing activity in the world.

The themes underpin the construction of a theology of displacement, which can address the current displacement crises, especially in Nigeria, of the people who become IDPs.

IDP Crisis in Nigeria and Matthew 2:13-23

The paper compares the situation in Matthew's narrative to the reality in Nigeria in relation to the issue of violence-induced displacement. The author draws parallels between Matthew's

narrative and the current situation in Nigeria in regard to violence-induced displacement. The story of Matthew 2:13-23 was set in a first century context, but there are striking similarities with the experiences of internally displaced persons (IDPs) in modern-day Nigeria. Violence, insecurity, forced movement, vulnerability and the fight for survival are all present in both contexts. The story of Jesus and his family is a reminder that displacement can happen anywhere, at any time, and to anyone. It was political violence that displaced the Holy Family. Herod was afraid of losing his power, so he decided to kill the innocent children, which was what compelled Joseph, Mary and Jesus to flee. In a similar manner, the majority of the displacement in Nigeria is primarily as a result of violent conflicts such as Boko Haram insurgency, armed banditry, communal clashes, kidnapping and attacks against civilians. Research shows that millions of Nigerians have been displaced due to the fear of death, persecution, or extreme insecurity if they stay in their home country (Babajide et al., 2024; Oghuvbu, 2024).

Joseph's family was not the only one that did not have a choice about displacement; many IDP families in Nigeria did not either. They were forced to move because of things they could not control. In north-east Nigeria, Gwadabe et al. (2018) report that displacement is often sudden and families often have limited time to make preparations or accumulate resources prior to leaving. These experiences have a lot in common with the urgency that is so apparent in Matthew's story in which Joseph is told to go away immediately for the sake of the child's life. Thus, the experience of Nigerian IDPs can be analyzed in the light of the theological implications of the Matthean account. Both stories tell of the political violence that turns regular families into refugee populations.

The Vulnerability and Experience of Loss

An aspect of displacement is to be vulnerable. Vulnerability is seen in the person of the child Jesus in Matthew 2:13-23. The baby has no political, military or social leverage. His life hinges on God's providence and his father's love. This vulnerability is reflective of the situation that many Nigerians in IDP camps are in. Women and children make up a significant percentage of the displaced population and tend to be most affected during conflict and displacement. According to Ajàyí (2020), women displaced persons are often faced with poverty, insecurities, exploitation and lack of access to basic services among other harsh conditions. Likewise, Olufadewa et al. (2022), report that mental health difficulties such as depression, trauma, anxiety and hopelessness are prevalent amongst young displaced persons. There are often many losses that are associated with displacement. People lose their homes, means of making a living, social connections, educational opportunities, and community identities. In an implicit way, Matthew's account recognizes such losses. The departure from Bethlehem means the Holy Family are leaving their comfort zone and entering a future which is unknown in foreign territory.

A recent study on displacement also shows that displacement is more than physical relocation. Ahmadipour and Sordé-Martí (2024) stated that belonging and identity are frequently disrupted in forced migration. People have to create meaning and social identities in new contexts. This piece of insight aligns well to Matthew's story where displacement is an experience of uncertainty and transition. Theologically, Jesus' vulnerability is a challenge to triumphalist understandings of Christian faith. The Messiah appears in the world in a situation of danger and displacement. This kind of image creates a sense of unity between Christ and today's forcibly displaced.

Rachel's Weeping and the Trauma of Nigerian IDPs

Matthew's use of Jeremiah 31:15 introduces Rachel as a symbol of collective grief. Her tears symbolise pain, injustice and loss. This picture is a powerful tool in understanding the emotional and psychological aspects of displacement in Nigeria.

IDPs suffer from a great psychological trauma, as evidenced in studies. Ngwu et al. (2023) associate trauma, grieving, social isolation and adjustment problems as common issues for displaced communities. Similarly, Olufadewa et al. (2022) indicate the prevalence of emotional distress among children IDPs, who have seen killings, property destruction, and family separation. As Rachel laments, the issue of displacement is not just one of logistics or humanitarian concerns. It is also a crisis of emotions and spirit. Numbers, camps and resource needs are often the main subjects of statistical reports. But in Matthew's story, it's the human suffering of displacement that becomes a focus.

African contextual hermeneutics is a helpful hermeneuticism with which we can engage this reality. African biblical interpretation tends to prioritise lived experiences of communities and views suffering as a valid point of departure for theological reflection (Mojola, 2022; Chukwuka, 2022). In this context, Rachel's tears can be seen as the tears of the Nigerian mothers who lost their children, their homes, their futures to the war. Notably, Matthew does not put an end to lament. He rather embeds the grief in the sacred narrative. Therefore, Christian responses to displacement should provide opportunities to express pain without fearing being judged or having the experience theologically simplified. Hence, it is important that in pastoral ministry with displaced people emotional and spiritual healing should also be addressed.

Exodus: Divine Presence amid Displacement

Divine accompaniment is one of the major theological themes of Matthew 2:13–23. God is active in the journey of the Holy Family, despite their insecurity and displacement. Joseph is constantly directed throughout by angelic messages, guiding and protecting the family. Divine accompaniment is a recurring biblical response to displacement that is often characterized by migration theologians. God doesn't promise to keep people from suffering when they move, but he rides with them in their pain. This theological insight is especially pertinent in the context of displacement in Nigeria. Faith plays a large role in many coping strategies for displaced persons. Research on religious experiences of the displaced has noted that prayer, worship, religious community and religious beliefs can be a major factor in resilience and psychological health (Pertek et al 2023).

The Matthean story helps to emphasize this fact by showing that even when the odds seem against them, God is still present. Egypt, a land far off and strange, is the place where God's protective plans unfold. This theme is a welcome corrective to the view of some Nigerian Christians that suffering is a sign of God's abandonment. Matthew portrays displacement as an experience where God is present and active. Divine accompaniment must also not be understood passively at the same time. God's protection in the story is done through tangible actions. God gives instructions to Joseph, and Joseph has to take action and save his family. That means that faith and action work together. This principle is crucial for Christian response to displacement. Churches are called not only to speak God's word of comfort, but to be active in protecting and caring for vulnerable populations.

Church's Responsibility with IDPS

Matthew 2:13-23 raises questions about the role of the church in situations of displacement. Displaced persons are not a 'marginal' issue in Christian ministry if Jesus, himself, was a migrant. Their experiences need to be at the heart of theological reflection and ecclesial practice.

Current research shows that displaced people have already received significant support by faith-based organisations in Nigeria. Afolaranmi (2020) points out that religious organizations have played a role in rehabilitation and reintegration of the victims of insurgency. In the same vein, Iweze (2022) records the wide range of supports that are being offered by faith-based organisations in the displacement camps. These interventions are still very useful, but in Matthew's story, there is a theological vision. Four interrelated dimensions will help to understand the responsibility of the church.

Prophetic Responsibility: Herod is an example of oppressive political authority which produces pain. The church thus has a prophetic duty to speak out against violence, corruption, injustice and policies that result in displacement. But the inaction of the oppressed in the presence of the oppressor is an affront to the moral message of Matthew's story.

Pastoral Responsibility: The trauma and grief in the life of displaced peoples necessitates purposeful pastoral care. Churches should offer counselling, spiritual care, trauma healing and community care.

Humanitarian Responsibility: Practical support is still a must. Christian compassion is expressed in food, shelter, health care, education and livelihood support. The church's mission cannot be separated from concern for material well-being.

Public Theological Responsibility: Churches are to interact with public institutions, call for lasting solutions, push for policy changes and act for social justice. Migration theology highlights that the church's response to migration must focus on the root causes and not on the symptoms of the situation (Kerwin, 2024; Magezi & Magezi, 2020). Together, these responsibilities illustrate a comprehensive strategy to address displacement that is modeled after Christ.

Nigeria's theology of internal displacement is presented in the following six steps

The connection between the dialogue of Matthew 2:13-23 and the displacement crisis in Nigeria forms the base for a contextual theology of ID. This kind of theology should be the product of the encounter between Scriptures and the reality of experiences and situations of displaced communities.

The Presence of God in the World: The first aspect of the Nigerian theology of displacement is the presence of God. Matthew shows us that God goes with those who are forced to move. This theological conviction confronts narratives of abandonment and provides hope to those communities that are in a state of uncertainty and loss. The message of divine presence offers spiritual resources that enable people to be resilient as they try to cope with suffering, for the displaced Nigerians.

Theological Anthropology:

A Theology of Human Dignity: The Gospel of Matthew's presentation of the little child Jesus validates the worth of helpless lives. The story is a rejection of the systems that use people as a means to a political end. Therefore, a theology of displacement must include the dignity of each and every migrant, irrespective of his or her ethnic, religious, gender or social background. This attitude facilitates advocacy for better protection, rights and social inclusion of the displaced populations.

A Theology of Hope: The return from Egypt bears witness to the fact that the final word of displacement is not the final word. While there is suffering here, Matthew's story is one of restoration and renewal. This hope is not to be confused with passive optimism. Instead, it encourages for active involvement in the process of reconstruction of conflict-affected lives, communities and institutions.

A Theology of Responsibility: Finally, Matthew's story invites Christians to be active participants in displacement. Joseph's obedience is an example of the necessity of putting faith into action. Thus, churches, Christian leaders and faith-based organisations have a responsibility to respond to displacement through advocacy, compassion, justice and social transformation.

Thus, a theology of internal displacement in Nigeria extends beyond charity to a holistic approach to the structural, psychological, spiritual and social aspects of the IDP situation. Theologically, this strategy knows that care for displaced persons cannot be an optional part of the Christian mission. It is a reaction that stems from the narrative itself of Jesus, the story of Jesus, who was a child on the move, a refugee, a refugee from political violence.

Conclusion

This study has re-read Matthew 2:13–23 in the light of forced migration and its pertinence for Nigeria's current IDP predicament. This article has shown how the Matthean infancy narrative also has a profound theology of displacement, which has often been overlooked in the traditional interpretations that have focused on Christological themes, fulfilment citations or Moses typology. The life of Jesus, Mary and Joseph shows us a family forced to live in exile from political violence, forced to live in a foreign land, living in uncertainty and eventually living in a new life yet still in a situation of insecurity.

In the exegetical analysis, the four major theological themes were found: vulnerability, divine protection, resilience and hope in Matthew 2: 13-23. This story doesn't depict Jesus as a bystander to distress; it shows him to be a man who suffered from being displaced and insecure. This vulnerability of the child Jesus sets an important point of identification with the displaced populations, as often it is women and children who suffer the most from conflict-induced displacement. Yet at the same time, Matthew includes the word 'always' in his description of what God is doing and guiding people through the displacement process, indicating that God is not taking a break during crisis and uncertainty.

Matthew's account and the situation of displacement in Nigeria had key similarities of which the dialogue yielded important points. But many IDPs in Nigeria have been displaced as the Holy Family was, due to violence, insecurity and a threat to life. Their experiences of trauma, grief, social disruption and uncertainty ring true to the themes that are found within Matthew's

account. Indeed, the depiction of Rachel's weeping in particular offers a rich theological context for the suffering of people as a whole that accompanies displacement and conflict.

This study has also proposed that Matthew 2:13-23 helps in the development of a contextual Nigerian theology of IDPs. This theology is based on four interrelated aspects: presence, dignity, hope and responsibility. These themes collectively invite churches, faith-based organizations and Christian communities to go beyond a restricted vision of charity towards a comprehensive response to displaced people. The mission of the church is to provide humanitarian relief, trauma healing, prophetic advocacy, social justice, and to engage in work to address the root causes of displacement. The article adds to the current scholarly literature on the infancy narrative of Matthew by broadening the arguments beyond the traditional Christological ones, and centering displacement in theological reflection. It also serves as a contribution towards migration theology, as it shows how the Bible stories can be used in African contexts to respond to the migration crises of today. Most significantly, the study highlights that the displacement phenomenon is not only a political and humanitarian crisis but has a theological dimension as well, a point that requires to be taken seriously by scholars and faith communities.

Future research can draw on this work by identifying further migration stories in Scripture, engaging in empirical research among displaced Christian communities in Nigeria, and seeking to develop better integration of Bible theology in practical response to displacement. This research would also help to continue the dialogue between biblical studies, migration theology and African contextual hermeneutics.

Recommendation

- Security around the Chadian population should be enhanced and the root causes of the displacement such as insurgency, banditry and communal violence should be addressed by government agencies.
- There is a need for ongoing humanitarian aid, trauma counselling and psychosocial support to IDPs in churches and other faith-based organizations.
- There is a need to improve access to health, education, and livelihoods in displacement camps through humanitarian interventions.
- Policy makers need to establish sustainable resettlement/reintegration policies which uphold the dignity and rights of IDPs.
- Christian leaders and theologians should foster a theology of displacement which will instigate advocacy, social justice and integration of displaced communities.

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