HOPE AMIDST DESOLATION: A SOCIO-HISTORICAL AND THEOLOGICAL REFLECTION ON MYANMAR CATHOLICISM[1]

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Abstract. This research paper examines the profound spiritual resilience of Catholics in Myanmar amid ongoing socio-political turmoil, including the *coup d'état*, civil war, and rising inflation. Utilizing socio-historical and literary analyses, this paper investigates how Psalm 23 functions as a vital source of hope and consolation, fostering resilience among Myanmar Catholics experiencing uncertainty and desolation. The analysis highlights Psalm 23:4, which states, "even though I walk through the darkest valley, I fear no evil for you are with me," and explores the metaphor of God as a shepherd who provides and protects, resonating with the lived experiences of believers facing suffering and instability. This paper further reflects on the enduring resilience and daily protection attributed to God, despite challenges faced by Church leaders. Finally, the paper demonstrates how biblical texts offer a framework for understanding and nurturing hope, faith, and perseverance during turbulent times, and advocates for enhanced pastoral leadership rooted in scriptural wisdom.

Keywords: resilience, coup, Myanmar, desolation, hope

Introduction

Myanmar, a Southeast Asian country, has a rich culture and traditions that are based on the majority Buddhist religion,

1 GenAI Declaration: This paper used Grammarly Application for the following components: sentence check, grammar check, and vocabulary check.

with other minor religions such as Christianity, Hinduism, and Islam coexisting peacefully. There was a democratic transition led by Aung San Suu Kyi, a leader who spent decades advocating for democracy. With this effort, a political and economic transition process began under the power of the military government in 2011. Furthermore, the people in Myanmar experienced the real and first democratic elections that were held in 2015. From that election, the National League of Democracy party (NLD), a party led by Aung San Suu Kyi, won the election, and the country became a democratic nation. From 2011 until 2020, Myanmar experienced a free and safe nation with high economic growth. This became a great economic reform and optimism for greater economic stability in the nation. However, on 1st February 2021, a military coup set back the democratic nation and development, as well as the seizure of Tatmadaw (Myanmar Armed Forces), made the fragile progress towards civilian rule, spread the violence, political instability, and the devastation for economic development. As a result, the country has increased the number of poor and hungry, internal conflict, and displacement from civil war. According to the UN, 18.6 million or approximately one-third of the population is in need of humanitarian assistance, including six million children.[2] The recent crises have eroded many of the development and achievements made over the past decades.

The impact of civil war is awful because millions of people have been forced to flee and displaced from their native places and moved to neighboring countries such as Thailand and India as Internally Displaced Persons (IDP) in many refugee camps. The tactics of the military applied the use of airstrikes attacks on their own Myanmar civilians, and many civilians

2 "The World Bank in Myanmar," *World Bank Group*, October 8, 2024, https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/myanmar/overview (accessed May 3, 2026).

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experienced the loss of life and suffered from the escalation of violence. The military regime cracked down on freedom of speech, assembly, and the press, then arrested the journalists and activists, and anyone who joined in these movements. These actions created an atmosphere of fear and uncertainty, and difficult for civilians to live and rebuild their communities. The coup also disrupted the investment, trade, and services. The value of currency has declined, and there was inflation has eroded for buying power of ordinary citizens. The rising cost of food, medicines, and other basic necessities has pushed millions into poverty, and it is difficult for civilians to meet their basic needs. The effect of *coup d'état*, ongoing civil war, and economic crisis has led to deep despair and hopelessness for many civilians in Myanmar.

The Catholic Church in Myanmar is a minority religion within a majority Buddhist nation. The Church plays a role in social services and volunteer acts to foster a strong sense of community for its members in Church. Since the 2021 coup, Myanmar Catholics have experienced an ongoing crisis of violence, displacement, and destruction of their homes and livelihoods, and the loss of loved ones from the bombing attack of airstrikes. The people experienced emotional and psychological traumas from their experiences of suffering. The Church leaders find it difficult to solve these issues to stop the violence with the military government. However, the ability of Church is to provide pastoral care, administer sacraments, and help civilians remain resilient and hope amidst this chaos and suffering.

In the midst of profound desolation and ongoing crisis in Myanmar, Psalm 23, as "The Lord is my shepherd," offers the message of hope and resilience. The importance of Psalm 23 resonates with the experience of humans in times of crisis.

It shows the central metaphor for God as a shepherd of care, guidance, and protection for God's flock to provide their needs and save them from danger. While Myanmar civilians are facing the challenges from the coup, civil war, and economic crisis, the message of Psalm 23 provides a source of hope and strength for those experiencing violence, displacement, and loss of loved ones to find hope and sustain faith amidst the sufferings. Therefore, this research paper argues that Psalm 23 serves as an important source of hope and resilience for Myanmar civilians, offering a framework for understanding their sufferings, fostering their faith, and inspiring perseverance in times of socio-political turmoil.

Methodological Approach

The research paper draws on two complementary methods of interpretation: socio-historical analysis and literary-theological analysis. These are read together through the lens of contextual theology. Stephen B. Bevans argues in the book of *Models of Contextual Theology* that all genuine theological reflection must begin from within a specific human situation, because the context of a community shapes not only what questions are asked but how Scripture itself is heard and what it is heard to say.[3] This means that Myanmar context in this paper does not merely serve as background scenery for a Psalm 23 interpretation but it is a genuine source for the theological interpretation. The socio-historical method applied here grounds that context in specific institutional and scholarly documentation, rather than leaving it as a fuzzy general view.

The contemporary humanitarian situation is the focus of this paper, which draws on the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA). The annual

3 Stephen B. Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theology*, rev. and exp. ed. (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2002), 4.

Myanmar Humanitarian Needs and Response Plans, compiled by the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), included verified field data on displacement figures, civilian casualties and humanitarian access from UN agencies and local bodies operating across all areas of military control.[4] This institutional documentation is compiled from primary field reports across the country and differs substantially in character from journalistic sources. For the broader perspective of political and religious history of Myanmar since independence, the present paper draws on David I. Steinberg's *Burma/ Myanmar: What Everyone Needs to Know*, being a widely cited scholarly introductions to the modern political history of country. Steinberg looks at how the military has always been hostile towards ethnic and religious minorities. This goes from the colonial period through Ne Win's socialist government, State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC) and State Peace and Development Council (SPDC), and into the present coup, providing the historical framework within which this paper situates the Catholic Church's long experience of survival under pressure.[5]

For the specifically ecclesial dimension, this paper uses the official statements from the Catholic Bishop's Conference of Myanmar (CBCM). These documents are the Catholic Church's own account of what is happening to it and how it is responding. In their June 2021 plenary statement, the thirteen bishops of the CBCM described thousands of Catholics "starving in the jungles" and pleaded for humanitarian corridors- speaking not as outside observers of a crisis but as pastors already

4 Marcoluigi Corsi, "Myanmar Humanitarian Needs and Response Plan 2024 (December 2023)," https://www.unocha.org/publications/report/myanmar/myanmar-humanitarian-needs-and-response-plan-2024-december-2023-enmy (Accessed August 13, 2026).

5 David I. Steinberg, *Burma/ Myanmar: What Everyone Needs to Know* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 67-70.

inside it.[6] Together, these sources allow this paper to show how the socio-historical method actually works in practice: the Myanmar context from which Psalm 23 is read is a documented, historically specific situation, not an unclear general setting.

This paper is also characterized by an honest acknowledgement of the limits of its socio-historical grounding. The Pontifical Institute for Foreign Missions (PIME) has maintained a missionary presence in Burma since 1868, and the Paris Foreign Mission Society (MEP) arrived even earlier. Both institutions possess archival records, including mission diaries, correspondence between missionaries and Rome, and reports on local Catholic communities under colonial and post-independence governments. These records offer the potential to provide a more comprehensive primary documentation of the Catholic Church's history in Myanmar prior to independence. It should be noted that the archives in question were not directly accessible during the preparation of this research. Where such depth is unavailable, this paper uses a strategy of triangulation. This involves the integration of institutional reports named above, in addition to scholarly secondary sources cited throughout the text, and the firsthand testimonies from individuals in Myanmar who have direct experience of the present crisis. This approach aligns with the "praxis model" of contextual theology as proposed by Bevans that the lived testimony of a community under pressure is itself treated as a legitimate theological source, not a lesser substitute for archival documentation.[7] The testimonies of Cardinal Charles

6 Catholic Bishop's Conference of Myanmar, "Myanmar Church urges 'Humanitarian Corridor' to conflict zone," *Vatican News*, June 11, 2021. https://www.vaticannews.va/en/church/news/2021-06/myanmar-catholics-bishops-appeal-humanitarian-corridor.html

7 Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theology*, 70-73.

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Bo, Archbishop Marco Tin Win, Father Donald Martin, and the displaced Catholics of Kayah State are examined throughout this paper with this spirit that they are not merely used as illustrations of a point made elsewhere, but as primary evidence of what hope, faith, and resilience look like when Psalm 23 is prayed not in a room but in the midst of a civil war.

In contrast, the literary-theological method involves attending closely to the language, imagery, structure, and rhetorical movement of Psalm 23 itself. This involves examining key Hebrew terms, the progression of metaphors of shepherd and sheep, and the way how the psalm invites the reader into an act of trust rather than mere observation. This paper read the psalm as a "psalm of trust," with the perspectives of Brueggemann, Wenham and other scholars. This approach allows the paper to identify the theological claims the text makes about divine presence, provision and protection in the lives of people.

Bringing these two methods together is the fundamental objective of contextual theology which asserts that the biblical interpretation should never be considered a one-way movement from the text to the reader. Instead, the lived experience of a community becomes a genuine partner, raising new questions of the text and being addressed in turn by it. For Myanmar Catholics, the experience of military coup, displacement and martyrdom is not merely incidental background information; rather, it is the very horizon from which the words of Psalm 23 is interpreted and heard with urgency issue as a word of hope amid desolation. Therefore, this combined methodology does not merely illustrate the psalm with contemporary examples, but it allows the socio-historical reality of Myanmar and the literary-theological content of Psalm 23 to interpret one another.

Socio-Historical Context

The socio-historical approach helps this paper to explore the context of Myanmar Catholics, how the current situations and experiences are rooted in Myanmar's history, cultural background, and society. Myanmar is a diverse country with 135 ethnic groups, and there are eight major ethnic such as Kachin, Kayah, Kayin, Chin, Burma, Mon, Rakhine, and Shan. The Burmese ethnic is the largest ethnic, and the government made the Burmese language as a national language. For religion, Buddhism is the major religion in Myanmar, while Catholicism is a minority group within the nation. Myanmar was colonized by the British, with a complex history, and many missionaries came to Myanmar to do evangelization during the colonial period. Catholicism has been present in Myanmar for over 500 years. However, the Catholics in Myanmar faced many problems from the military after gaining independence in Myanmar. Graceffo mentioned in the article on the *Catholic in Myanmar's Civil War*, "Since Myanmar gained independence in 1948, successive military regimes have portrayed Catholics as traitors, subjecting them to repression."[8] The missionaries in Myanmar made many efforts by doing the evangelizations for the benefit of Catholics. However, the military junta, under General Ne Win, position as a dictator, forced the missionaries to leave the country in 1965. Therefore, the Catholicism in Myanmar faced many struggles related to self-determination and human rights in the past.

To go deeper into the history of Catholicism, the minority of Catholicism arrived in Myanmar in the 18th and 19th centuries with the effort of missionaries from European countries. Most of the priests were Italians, and they could speak and teach the

8 Antonio Graceffo, "Catholics in Myanmar's Civil War," *Providence*, January 17, 2024, https://providencemag.com/2024/01/catholics-in-myanmars-civil-war/ (accessed May 5, 2026).

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Myanmar people in English. The missionaries and the Catholic community engaged in education, social services, and healthcare, which help and foster not only Catholics but also for the other non-Catholics in Myanmar. Sai Leng, a Buddhist student from a Catholic school, expressed that "Although students at the Catholic school had to attend chapel and religious instruction, there was no requirement to convert to Catholicism."[9] The missionaries did not persuade the Buddhist students and other ethnic students to convert to Catholicism, but they gave the service of education for the well-being of the nation. Although the missionaries did excellent work in Myanmar, the military junta, General Ne Win, forced the missionaries to go back to their own countries in 1965. Then, all the systems of education and healthcare in Myanmar became poor and collapsed.

Nowadays, the Catholics from different minor ethnic groups are facing different kinds of oppressions in Myanmar because of the ongoing war. After the coup, the Burmese army (Tatmadaw) increased the brutality for the innocent ethnic groups in different areas. Khu Ko Reh, a director of the minor ethnic group of Karenni Civil Society, mentioned, "In the past, they mostly dropped bombs where fighting was taking place. It used to be that when the bombs were falling, civilians could seek refuge in buildings. But now, they also drop bombs on IDP camps, clinics, hospitals, schools, churches, and temples."[10] They intentionally target the public areas like churches and attack the places of refuge. This creates excessive turmoil and suffering for the civilians, especially for refugees. Therefore, this paper shows that from the past until the present moment how the military junta oppressed the missionaries as well as innocent Catholic civilians in times of suffering.

9 Graceffo, "Catholics in Myanmar's Civil War."

10 Graceffo, "Catholics in Myanmar's Civil War."

Challenges Faced by Myanmar Citizens

The military coup in Myanmar since 1st February 2021 has created many crises with economic inflation and instability for Myanmar citizens. The impact of the coup led to complex inflation, increased poverty, and a decline in the standard of living for the people of Myanmar. First, the primary cause of inflation disrupted trade and investment. Because of political instability and widespread conflict from the coup, the economy in Myanmar became uncertain and discouraged from continuing the foreign investment. Foreign businesses have left the country due to deteriorating business performance, while others have left due to sanctions-related issues. A few companies remain simply because they are unable to fully withdraw.[11] The new foreign investments have plummeted in Myanmar, and they have decided to cancel their businesses in Myanmar. This decline in investment has led to an economic deficit in trade. In addition, there was increasing poverty, which was driven by inflation. In June 2024 the regime had printed 30 trillion kyat since the coup.[12] This shows that inflation has peaked at 35% in 2022, especially for food items and transport. The government increased the essential goods, so people in Myanmar find it difficult to handle the need for the goods with their own incomes. Moreover, many young people are fleeing to other countries, especially Thailand and India, to work and survive their lives. Nearly one-fifth of Myanmar's population has left their home communities due to economic hardship or conflict, reducing the working-age population

11 Jared Bissinger, "Challenges and Priorities for Myanmar's Conflicted Economy," *Yusof Ishak Institute*, 13 February 2025, https://www.iseas.edu.sg/wp-content/uploads/2025/01/ISEAS_Perspective_2025_11.pdf, 6.

12 Bissinger, "Challenges and Priorities for Myanmar's Conflicted Economy," 3.

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and lowering productivity.[13] The Myanmar military regime made the economy worse, so many young people migrated to other countries, which led the country to increase poverty and economic hardship. The disruption to trade and investment and the ongoing conflict have led to a complex economic crisis. The result of slow growth, high inflation, and widespread poverty has shown a challenging and uncertain future for the people of Myanmar.

Moreover, the Church leaders, like priests and religious, face many challenges since the 2021 coup till the ongoing war in the present time. They found it difficult to provide pastoral care for the people in the conflict zone and maintain the mission of the Church within the mix of feelings of fear and oppression. Cardinal Charles Bo expressed in the article of *Catholic World Report*, "The conflict has already left more than 100 places of worship bombed or damaged, and the violence has spread in many areas of the territory. In addition, almost 3 million people have been displaced and are in urgent need of assistance."[14] The Church is the place for gathering of a Catholic community – the place where the sacrament are celebrated, where the children are baptized, and where the dead are mourned. When more than hundred worship spaces are bombed and burned, the military is not only attacking the buildings but attacking the spiritual space that holds the Catholic life together. Cardinal Charles Bo points at the center of this crisis is an attempt to unmake the Church not only physically but spiritually,

13 Bissinger, "Challenges and Priorities for Myanmar's Conflicted Economy," 3.

14 Ana Paula Morales and Andrés Henriquez, "Myanmar conflict: a state of unprecedented turmoil and suffering, Cardinal says," *Catholic News Agency*, May 24, 2024, https://www.catholicworldreport.com/2024/05/24/myanmar-conflict-a-state-of-unprecedented-turmoil-and-suffering-cardinal-bo-says/ (accessed May 8, 2026).

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destroying the spaces where Catholics gather, worship, and recognize themselves as a community.

However, Cardinal Charles Bo made a universal call for peace and said, "We call on all parties to seek a path of peace. At the beginning of the war, the Church tried to bring together all parties to work for consensus. Recently, the avenues for peace seem to be limited, but the Church continues to reach out to all stakeholders in the hope of bringing peace."[15] What makes this especially difficult is that negotiations with the military regime have produced little result. This shows how the Church leaders faced the challenges of freedom to save their sheep in a conflict war zone. The Church leaders are trying to negotiate with the military not to harm the Catholics and the Church in the war zone, as well as to support the people who have psychological trauma from these sufferings. The people in a war zone experience mental disorders, depression, and anxiety. They feel the powerlessness and hopelessness because of the fear of persecution and suppression of human rights. The Church tries to offer spiritual care, like prayer and sacrament, as well as mental health services like counselling for those who are affected by mental disorders in war zones. The Church plays an important role in providing the basic needs of its own members in conflict areas and offers spiritual and psychological guidance to overcome these traumas and find hope amid despair.

Historical and Literary Analysis on Psalm 23

The passage of Psalm 23 explains God as a shepherd who is depicted as a caring and loving guide for God's people. This psalm focuses on imagery, metaphors, and poetic structures to enhance its message of protection and guidance, which offer the strength for those facing adversity, particularly the Myanmar

15 Morales and Henriquez, "Myanmar Conflict."

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citizens enduring the ongoing crisis. Psalm 23 explains three main points: God's provision, protection, and peace on earth. God's provision can be seen in verse 1, "The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want." This sentence gives the message that God is not withholding anything. God provides us abundantly that we are not lacking but overflowing with a true blessing. God's provision is stable and still given even in the face of adversity in our lives.

The central metaphor of the shepherd and the sheep in Psalm verse 1 is a powerful example of how the shepherd embodies God's care, guidance, and protection while the sheep represent the vulnerable being. This helps the sheep avoid pain, injury, and even death. God's protection over our lives is often unseen, but the faithful can feel the benefits of God's constant love and care. In addition, the author can see the meaning of "shepherd" in the book *Exploring the Old Testament*; the author mentioned that:

> The metaphor of the shepherd was a rich one in ancient Israel. In a largely agricultural society, everyone knew about the ways of sheep and the responsibilities of shepherds. Because of the very seasonal nature of the rains, there were times of year when good pasture was hard to find, and it was the shepherd's duty to find it for the sheep. Since the pasture was out in the open country, the shepherd had to protect the sheep from predators. So, shepherding was about provision and protection for the flock. In the ancient Near East, 'shepherd' was a title applied to leaders. Both gods and kings were spoken of as shepherds of their people. The shepherd mace שֵׁבעט (rod) as a stick and מִשְׁעֶנֶת (staff) were often used as symbols of office. Through the metaphor of 'shepherd,' the psalmist speaks of Yahweh as the one who can be relied on to provide for and protect, the one who trusts in him.[16]

The shepherd mace (rod) as a stick and (staff) as a support of walking stick which shows the symbol of shepherd. The rod and the staff are the shepherd's weapon and implement. These instruments of guidance help David even in the valley

16 Ernest C. Lucas, *Exploring the Old Testament: A Guide to the Psalms and Wisdom Literature*, vol. 3, Exploring the Bible: Old Testament (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003), 39.

of the shadow of death, and God guides David even through correction. It is a great comfort to know that God will correct us when we need it. Moreover, this beautiful prayer with "The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want" evokes the nomadic environment of sheep farming and the experience of familiarity between the shepherd and the sheep. This image calls us to see the atmosphere of trust, intimacy, and tenderness, how the shepherd knows each one of the sheep and calls them by name, and they follow the shepherd because they recognize and trust in the shepherd. God looks after God's sheep and is ready to defend them and to guarantee their well-being and enable them to live a peaceful life. The sheep can lack nothing as long as the shepherd is with them. The psalmist refers to this experience by calling God a shepherd and letting God lead the sheep to a safe place.

The other scholars of the Psalm have brought out dimensions of the shepherd image that speak directly to the situation of Myanmar Catholics. The scholar Artur Weiser in his commentary on the Psalms argues that the message of Psalm 23 is not simply a personal feeling of comfort. It is rooted in Israel's covenantal relationship with Yahweh, the same covenant established in the Exodus, when God fed, led and protected a people who had nothing of their own to rely on.[17] This covenantal relationship shows that the sheep does not trust the shepherd because the shepherd has proven pleasant; but the sheep trusts because the shepherd has made a promise and kept it through generations. For the Catholics of Myanmar- a community with no political power and no guarantee that tomorrow will be safer than today- the confidence of "I shall not want" is not wishful thinking but is grounded in God's historical faithfulness.

17 Artur Weiser, *The Psalms: A Commentary*, trans. Herbert Hartwell (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1962), 228.

Another scholar, James L. Mays, points to the political and social dimensions of the shepherd-king image in the ancient Near East. The Kings were called shepherds of their people, and the specific duty of a shepherd was to protect the vulnerable. In the ancient Near East, the duty of a shepherd-king extended specifically to protecting the vulnerable - the landless, the widow, the person without a defender and the that protective accountability was built into the very image itself.[18] The psalmist addresses God as "shepherd" and has positioned God's self as the one responsible for those who have no other protector. This speaks directly to Myanmar Catholics who have been abandoned by their own state and targeted by military junta that was supposed to defend them with God's protection and care. God as a shepherd takes on this role and takes on the accountability to protect for the people of Myanmar.

If the Lord is the Shepherd, even in the desert and desolate place of death, the author can say "I shall not want" because our life will not be ruined and destroyed, and God will be with us. Indeed, the shepherd has a good heart for the flock, and the shepherd knows what the needs of the sheep are. The shepherd walks and lives with them and leads them on the path of righteousness. The safety of the sheep is a priority for the shepherd, and the shepherd complies with this in leading the flock. If we follow the Good Shepherd, no matter how difficult, torturous, and deserts without water, one may walk on the paths of righteousness with the guidance of the Good Shepherd.

The patristic tradition finds deeper meaning here as well. Augustine of Hippo reflects on Psalm 23 in his *Exposition of the Psalms*, that the one who has God as shepherd is not in want, for He is his all. For Augustine, the shepherd restored and renews

18 James L. Mays, *Psalms*, Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching, ed. James L. Mays (Louisville: John Knox Press, 1994), 117.

those who have lost their strength through suffering.[19] For Augustine, "I shall not want" shows not to material needs but the deepest hungers of human person for life meaning, security and future that cannot be taken away. These are the hungers that military coups and economic collapse cannot satisfy and cannot destroy because they are hungers that only God can meet. The person who lives in this relationship with God, lacks nothing even when they lack everything in the ordinary sense.

Augustine goes further in his commentary on verse 3 that "he restores my soul as God drawing back to God's self the soul that has wandered. He guided me along the narrow paths of his righteousness for the sake of his own name."[20] Augustine clearly understood that human person who is always in danger of losing the way not only through sin, but through fear, grief and suffering. The shepherd's task is continual work of restoration, bringing back the soul that has lost not once, but as many times as it is needed. The reading of Augustine shows the experience of Myanmar Catholics who have been displaced, physically and psychologically wounded by years of civil war. However, Psalm 23 assures that God is not simply a God who was present in the beginning but God who keeps restoring for the wandering soul.

Moreover, the author can see how the Psalmist declares calm and assurance without doubt or fear in verse 4: "Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I fear no evil; for you are with me; your rod and your staff they comfort me." When one observes the literary explanation of this verse in the book of *Exploring the Old Testament*, the Hebrew adjective that is used to describe the "valley" can be

19 Augustine of Hippo, *Expositions of the Psalms 1-32*, trans. Maria Boulding (Hyde Park, New York: New City Press, 2000), 244.

20 Augustine, *Expositions of the Psalms 1-32*, 246.

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interpreted as a word meaning "darkness," or as a compound word meaning "shadow of death." The sense may be metaphorical, "deepest darkness," but the mention of death gives the added element of a sense of fear.[21] Walking through the valley of the shadow of death on our own does not produce a sense of peace. However, the psalmist encourages those who walk with the Lord, even in the dark valleys of suffering, doubt, and all the human problems, to feel safe. The phrase "I will fear no evil, for You are with me; Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me" means that the shepherd can correct the right way for the sheep, so that the sheep are on the right track. Similarly, God's peace comes because God is with us and one can trust in God. God's peace restores the broken and hurting parts of our souls. Therefore, the author can see how God loves us and cares for the sheep because God is our shepherd and the faithful will never lack and always have God's protection and peace. In the book of *Message of Psalms*, Brueggemann mentioned that "Evil is present in the world, but it is not feared. Confidence in God is the source of new orientation."[22] This symbolizes the divine provision and protection that reinforce the message of God's constant care and presence to give us peace. This literary analysis of the psalm enhances the message of God's protection and guidance, which serves as a source of hope and comfort for the people of Myanmar to find strength in their faith and to persevere through their suffering.

Restoration, Protection, and the Promise of God's House Psalm 23:2–3 and 5–6

While verses 1 and 4 in Psalm 23 have previously been analyzed as the foundation of God's provision and protection,

21 Lucas, *Exploring the Old Testament*, 40.

22 Walter Brueggemann, *The Message of the Psalms: A Theological Commentary* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1984), 156.

the surrounding verses deepen this message and speak as directly to the situation of Myanmar Catholics. Verse 2 states that "He makes me lie down in green pasture; he leads me beside still waters," and verse 3 continues by stating that "He restores my soul. He leads me in right paths for his name's sake." For sheep, lying down in the green pastures beside still waters is not a luxury but a necessity; the sheep that are anxious, thirsty or fatigued will not rest or nourish themselves no matter how abundant the pasture is. Therefore, the shepherd's role is first to create the conditions that enable rest to occur. For millions of Myanmar civilians who have been displaced on multiple occasions, who live under the constant threat of military airstrikes and who carry the cumulative exhaustion of years of conflict, this image of being made to lie down speaks to a need that is at once physical, emotional and spiritual. The ministry of Catholic Church to Internally Displaced Person (IDPs), through the provision of shelter, food assistance and a simple encouragement in IDP camps, can be understood as a concrete extension of act of shepherding that create the small spaces of green pasture and still water for the needs of sheep within a landscape.

The phrase "he restores my soul" is of particular significance for the population experiencing widespread trauma in Myanmar. The term can also be translated as "restoration," suggesting a soul that has wandered, weakened or lost its way being brought back to wholeness.[23] This is not a one-time event, but rather an ongoing action of the shepherd, repeated as often as the sheep strays or grows weary. When read alongside the experiences of Myanmar Catholics, many of whom carry profound grief over the loss of family members, homes, and the land. This verse offers a vision of God who does not abandon

23 Brueggemann, *The Message of the Psalms*, 154.

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the wounded soul to its wounds but continually works to restore it. The subsequent phrase, "He leads me in right paths for his name's sake," further grounds this restoration in God's own protection and faithfulness rather than in the merit of sheep. For a community that may feel powerless to change its political circumstances, this is a significant theological claim: the path forward is guaranteed not by human strength but by the trustworthiness of God's own name.

Verse 5 marks a transition in imagery, with a shift from shepherd and sheep to host and guest that "You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; you anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows." The act of setting a table is an act of hospitality and abundance and the fact that this table is prepared in the presence of my enemies. The psalmist does not claim that the enemies have been removed or the danger has passed; rather, God's goodness becomes visible precisely within the unresolved tension of a hostile situation.[24] For Myanmar Catholics who continue to assemble for celebrating Mass and devotions even in the midst of ongoing danger and violence, this verse offers the act of divine abundance and presence where the surrounding conflict and war cannot fully extinguish. With the image of overflowing cup in Eucharist, the Church in Myanmar is itself a sign of hope that exceeds the limits imposed by the crisis.

Finally, the psalm concludes with verse 6: "Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord my whole life long." This final verse of psalm serves to broaden the psalm's perspective, transitioning from the present journey to a permanent dwelling in God. For Myanmar Catholics, whose days are seen by uncertainty about tomorrow, this final verse provides an

24 Brueggemann, *The Message of the Psalms*, 155.

eschatological dimension: the hope expressed in Psalm 23 is not contingent on the resolution of present crisis, whether through a ceasefire, an election or an improved economy. However, the promise of dwelling in the house of the Lord help the Myanmar Catholics to firmly believe even the most severe present sufferings without denying their reality. In this way, the psalm as a whole from the immediate need of the sheep for pasture and water, through the assurance of presence in the valley of deep darkness, to the hospitality of the table and finally to the permanence of God's house, offers a complete hope that begins in the concrete struggles of daily survival and ends in the assurance of God's unending faithfulness.

The Experience of Myanmar Catholics

The main aim of Psalm 23 is to confess trust in the midst of the daily lives of believers, especially when we are in crisis. In the article on Working Preacher, the psalm is described as a psalm of trust. It speaks powerfully to and for God's people in troubled times.[25] The message from the psalm that "The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want" gives the message of hope, comfort, and assurance for the people of Myanmar. It invites Myanmar Catholics to recognize God's loving care and trust in God's provision and protection, that God is always present even in the most challenging circumstances. The message of trust and dependence on God is relevant to the context of Myanmar, where Catholics face immense suffering and uncertainty. It is to remind that even amidst desolate times, there is a source of hope and security from the divine shepherd.

25 Rolf Jacobson, "Commentary on Psalm 23," *Working Preacher–Luther Seminary Saint Paul*, March 30, 2014, https://www.workingpreacher.org/commentaries/revised-common-lectionary/fourth-sunday-in-lent/commentary-on-psalm-23-11 (Accessed May 10, 2026).

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The imagery of the shepherd who guides and protects the flock directly relates to the experiences of Myanmar Catholics. Psalm 23:4 says that "Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I will fear no evil, for you are with me." God is like a shepherd even in the darkest valley, providing a sense of security and reassurance for God's people. Therefore, David sang this phrase that David was under the care of the Lord, the shepherd. Even in a fearful place, the presence of the shepherd banished the fear of evil.[26] This shows the reality of suffering while asserting God's presence as a source of strength and courage. This is an invitation for Myanmar Catholics to have resilience and hope in the face of fear and violence.

Role of Faith in Sustaining Hope

Moreover, faith plays a crucial role in sustaining hope for Myanmar Catholics amidst the ongoing suffering and turmoil. In November 2017, Pope Francis visited the country of Myanmar. According to the archbishop of Yangon, during his visit, the pope gave "several messages of love and peace, but unfortunately, they didn't register." Despite everything, the cardinal added, it brought a message of peace between religions and their leaders.[27] It shows that the unwavering belief of Myanmar Catholics in God's presence and care, as mentioned in Psalm 23, provides a source of resilience and strength. The faith is not merely a passive acceptance but an active and lived experience that informs the daily lives of believers and offers a pathway to cope with the immense challenges faced in Myanmar.

The author believes that God is the shepherd, guiding and protecting through the darkest valley, which provides a deep

26 David Guzik, "Psalm 23 – The Lord is My Shepherd and My Host," *The Enduring Word Bible Commentary*, https://enduringword.com/bible-commentary/psalm-23/ (Accessed May 10, 2026).

27 Morales and Henriquez, "Myanmar conflict."

sense of security. However, this contrasts with the experience of Myanmar Catholics. There was a Catholic priest who was brutally murdered on 14th February 2025 in his parish of Our Lady of Lourdes in the Archdiocese of Mandalay, which is situated in the middle part of Myanmar. The name of the priest is Father Donald Martin Ye Naing Win, who was the parish priest of that Church. He was an active and pious priest who organized educational initiatives for the children and young people who could not attend school during the coup. Due to the ongoing war, many schools in that region remain closed. Thus, the parents sent their children to religious leaders and catechists who could provide education in the parish. The area where Father Donald served is controlled by the People's Defense Force (PDF), an armed group opposing Myanmar's military junta. On 14 February, a group of ten men came to Father Donald and asked him to stop helping the children by giving them an education. Furthermore, they asked Father Donald to kneel down in front of them. Father Donald did not kneel down and said, "I will only kneel down in front of God, not you." Then, they shot Father Donald, who died on the spot. Since that area is outside the control of the military junta, it is difficult to identify which group killed Father Donald, either the PDF or the military junta. It is sad that the military junta did not take responsibility for the murder of Father Donald. The Archbishop Marco Tin Win condemned the cycle of violence gripping the nation, saying, "Violence only brings death and destruction; it is always a defeat. He called upon all armed groups involved in the conflict to lay down their weapons and take a path of peace and reconciliation."[28] Father Donald's death is the worst

28 LiCAS News, "Massive turnout for funeral of slain Catholic priest in Myanmar," *Vatican News*, 18 February 2025, https://www.vaticannews.va/en/church/news/2025-02/myanmar-funeral-slain-catholic-priest-aggressors-arrested.html (Accessed May 12, 2026).

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tragic event in Myanmar. The Catholic Church in Myanmar calls for peace and reconciliation amid the persistent violence. Although the archbishop requested peace, there is no response to the peace, and the military junta continues to persecute the Church and religious priests, which shows crimes against humanity in Myanmar.

The faith of Father Donald motivates this author to see how he served his parish and helped the children who needed him the most. This was inspired by the example of Christ, who came to serve rather than to be served. Myanmar Catholics are called to do the acts of compassion and solidarity in times of suffering. Psalm 23 also inspires the people in Myanmar to persevere in their faith even when facing persecution and oppression. They can feel that the assurance of God is with them, even in the darkest valley, which provides a sense of courage and resilience in times of suffering and hopelessness in Myanmar.

Message on Resilience and Hope

From the theological perspective, resilience and hope are gifts from God that empower the person to endure suffering and persevere in faith. The ability to endure suffering and maintain faith with trust is a testament to God's grace and a reflection of divine presence in our lives. In the article *Working Preacher*, Jacobson mentioned, "In prayers for help, the emphasis is usually on crying out in complaint and requesting help. In the psalm of trust, the emphasis is on trust."[29] The Myanmar Catholics' suffering is a result of the ongoing crisis, which can be seen as Christ's own suffering that offers a path toward new life and liberation. Myanmar Catholics are participating in the

29 Jacobson, "Commentary on Psalm 23."

suffering of Christ, which led to a more profound connection with the divine.

The Catholic tradition has long held that solidarity in suffering is not incidental for Church's mission but belong to its very identity. The Second Vatican Council declared in *Gaudium et Spes* that "The joys and the hopes, the griefs and the anxieties of the people of this age, especially those who are poor or in any way afflicted, these are the joys and hopes, the griefs and anxieties of the followers of Christ."[30] This affirmation was something concrete for the Catholics of Myanmar. Their suffering is not a peripheral matter that the rest of universal Church looks at from a distance. However, it belongs to the whole body. The grief of a vulnerable people in Kayah State who has lost their home from airstrike is, according to pastoral constitution, the grief of the Church everywhere. This is not a rhetorical solidarity but it is an ecclesiological claim what the universal Church actually is.

Gaudium et Spes 22 further affirms that through the incarnation, the Son of God united himself in some fashion with every human being, so that those who endure suffering are never enduring it in a space that God has abandoned.[31] The document does not explain why God permits innocent people to suffer but it offers about God's accompaniment that God entered human history in Christ who continued to be present for the suffering people made in God's image. Myanmar Catholics who find themselves unable to pray, unable to feel God's nearness and protection amid their loss, this teaching gives the theological

30 Second Vatican Council, *Gaudium et Spes* (Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World), December 7, 1965, in *Documents of Vatican Council II*, ed. James H. Kroeger (Pasay: Paulines Publishing House, 2011), no.1.

31 *Gaudium et Spes*, no.22.

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assurance to what Psalm 23 expresses that the image of shepherd walking through the valley alongside the sheep.

Moreover, Pope Francis expressed the direct response to 2021 coup in Myanmar. In his Angelus prayer in Saint Peter's Square on 7 February 2021 that "In this most delicate moment I wish to again assure to the people of Myanmar my spiritual closeness, my prayer and my solidarity. And I pray that those who have positions of responsibility in the country will place themselves with sincere willingness at the service of the common good, promoting social justice and national stability, for a harmonious, democratic coexistence."[32] His declaration of closeness shows the grief of Myanmar's people was offered in the prayer of the universal Church. It is also consistent with Psalm 23 that the shepherd does not call out instructions from outside the valley but the shepherd goes in and be with his sheep.

The role of the shepherd in guiding, protecting, and providing for the flock shows how God's relationship with God's people and God's constant love offer comfort and strength in times of suffering in Myanmar. Guzik mentioned in his commentary, "The goodness and care suggested by the prepared table is set right in the midst of the presence of my enemies. The host's care and concern does not eliminate the presence of my enemies but enables the experience of God's goodness and bounty even in their midst."[33] God always prepares a table before God's people, even in the presence of enemies, showing divine protection and provision even in the midst of the suffering of Myanmar citizens.

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32 Pope Francis, *Angelus*, February 7, 2021, Angelus, https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/angelus/2021/documents/papa-francesco_angelus_20210207.html (Accessed August 12, 2026).

33 Guzik, "Psalm 23 – The Lord is My Shepherd and My Host."

Moreover, the hope proclaimed in Psalm 23 does not resolve the theological problem of evil. It does not explain why God permits the airstrikes and bombing of Churches in Kayah State, why thousands of children in Myanmar are hungry and flee every day, or why Father Donald Martin was shot in his own parish for helping the children while the military attacks and kills his own people. These are the real questions that the people of Myanmar living through this crisis and theological reflection does not serve them well too quickly.

Johann Baptist Metz, one of the political theologians of the twentieth century, argued that "the continuity of time is not the empty continuum of evolution, but rather the trail of suffering."[34] The suffering that must not be buried under easy hope. For Metz, hope arrives too cheaply is not genuinely Christian hope but it is a way of managing grief rather than facing it. The death experience of Father Donald, the hundreds of bombed churches and millions of displaced people must be kept alive and it is not smoothed over by the reading of Psalm 23 that God's presence feels like a comfortable guarantee against loss ones.

However, Metz did not abandon hope and expressed it more honestly. He argued that "respect for the dignity of suffering that has accumulated through time impels the apocalypse to understand nature's time from the perspective of the time of suffering. This certainly does not mean ignoring the billions of years of nature's time, but rather judging it to be sort of timeless time.[35] Hope survives not by denying suffering but insisting the last word has not yet been spoken. This is precisely what Psalm 23 does. The psalm does not promise that the valley will

34 Johann Baptist Metz, *A Passion for God: The Mystical-Political Dimension of Christianity*, trans. J. Matthew Ashley (New York: Paulist Press, 1998), 52.

35 Metz, *A Passion for God*, 53.

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disappear or the enemy will leave the table, but it promises in verse 6 that the journey through the valley ends not in the valley but in the house of the Lord. This is the assurance for Myanmar Catholics that the eschatological dimension is not escapism but the present suffering of Myanmar Catholics as real and as terrible is not the final word.

Furthermore, the role of Church leaders is an important one to provide hope and guidance for Myanmar Catholics in times of ongoing crisis. Cardinal Charles Bo, the archdiocese of Yangon, mentioned, "The wrongdoing committed against Father Donald Martin is not something that can be easily forgotten. We urge those responsible to take appropriate action and ensure justice is served, so that such incidents do not occur again in the future."[36] It is sad that the military junta never responds to the voice of Church leaders and continues to attack Catholic churches and religious priests brutally. However, their leadership helps sustain hope and perseverance for Myanmar Catholics in times of darkness. Moreover, hope is not about denying the reality of suffering but believing in the possibility of a better future, about peace and justice. In the context of Myanmar, this hope is focused on the promise of eternal life and the belief in God's victory over evil. Graceffo mentioned, "They are very brave. The civilians and leaders who persevere in their fight and faith serve as an example for Catholics everywhere."[37] The unwavering faith of Myanmar Church leaders and Catholics, with their resilience and service, is an expression of hope and resilience even in the midst of suffering.

36 Deborah Castellano Lubov, "Cardinal Bo prays for priest brutally killed in Myanmar, appeals for end to violence," *Vatican News*, 17 February 2025, https://www.vaticannews.va/en/church/news/2025-02/cardinal-bo-prays-for-priests-brutally-killed-in-myanmar.html (Accessed May 14, 2026).

37 Graceffo, "Catholics in Myanmar's Civil War."

Interreligious Dimensions: Catholic Resilience within a Buddhist-Majority Context

Although the primary focus of this paper is on Psalm 23 as a resource for the Catholic minority in Myanmar, it is important to contextualize this reflection within the broader religious landscape of the country, in which 85 percent of population follow Theravada Buddhism which is the majority religion in Myanmar.[38] The suffering caused by military coup, the civil war, and the economic collapse has not just confined to Catholic communities; but Buddhist monks, nuns and lay people have also been displaced. The monasteries have been damaged in the conflict areas and the members of the Sangha have been targeted and arrested for participating in pro-democracy demonstrations. The shared experience of suffering under military violence creates a common ground for the collaboration of Catholic and Buddhist communities in Myanmar often stand together in various forms including joint humanitarian relief efforts, shared use of monastery and church compounds as places for Internally Displaced People (IDP) and solidarity with people who are facing the challenges and uncertainties in this time of crisis.

Theologically, the message of Psalm 23 does not need to be presented as a claim that compare with Buddhist understanding of suffering; rather, it can be offered as the Catholic community's particular articulation of a hope that the other religious communities in Myanmar are also seeking the way, according to its own tradition. Buddhist teaching emphasizes impermanence and compassion (*metta* and *karuna*) as a proper response to the suffering of all sentient beings.[39] The Buddhist

38 Thant Myint-U, *The Hidden History of Burma: Race, Capitalism, and the Crisis of Democracy in the 21st* Century (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2019), 11.

39 Thant Myint-U, *The Hidden History of Burma*, 66.

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practice of cultivating a compassionate and detached mind amid the impermanence of all things shares a commonality with Psalm 23 which grounds hope in the personal and covenantal presence of shepherding God who walks with the sufferer through the valley. The Myanmar citizens who are experiencing the suffering such as military coup, airstrikes and economic hardship, the psalm's portrayal of a divine presence "in the presence of enemies" can serve as a foundational framework for respectful conversation about how different religions sustain hope in such circumstances of desolation in Myanmar.

The Asian contextual theologians have long argued that this kind of interreligious solidarity is not just something that the Church in Asia should focus on, but something that is important part of what the Church is in this part of the world. Aloysius Pieris, SJ who work on Asian theology argued that "The mission crisis is solved only when the church is baptized in the twofold liberative tradition of monks and peasants of Asia. The Asian church not as an teaching church but as a learning church, lost among the 'religious poor' of Asia in search of kingdom of holiness, justice and peace."[40] He points out that the real immersion is in the religious traditions and the poverty of the Asian peoples rather than a separation from them. For Myanmar Catholics, this is not a theological program to be implemented; but it is simply the reality of their daily lives. They have always lived with Buddhist neighbors, studied in the same schools, shared the same refugee camps and experienced the same sufferings since 2021. Pieris's argument is that this shared suffering is not an obstacle for the Church to overcome on its way to authentic Christian identity but it is the environment in which real Christian beliefs in Asia are formed.

40 Aloysius Pieris, SJ, *An Asian Theology of Liberation* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1988), 47.

Moreover, Peter C. Phan draws from the perspective of interfaith dialogue and argues that Asian Christians naturally inhabit multiple religious worlds and that genuine interreligious encounter is made possible not despite suffering but through it.[41] According to Phan, shared desolation creates a common ground that can't be created by just talking about religion. The two communities that have prayed in different beliefs for generations can find themselves standing on genuinely common ground when they are standing in the rubble of same airstrike. This insight reframes the interreligious dimension of Myanmar's crisis: the cooperation between Catholic and Buddhist communities under military violence is not just a way of agreement born of necessity but Phan would call it a genuine interreligious encounter – both communities' understanding of what hope looks like in face of suffering time. The hope of Psalm 23 does not erase the religious differences but because the reality it describes a community walking through a dark valley, sustained by trust in a presence that accompanies which resonates with something that the communities of Myanmar are experiencing the same suffering and also seeking for hope and peace in Myanmar.

This interreligious dimension also has the practical application for the Catholic Church's witness in Myanmar. Cardinal Charles Bo's repeated calls for peace and reconciliation in Myanmar which are addressed not only to Catholics but also to all parties and nations situate the Church's message of hope within a broader aspect to the whole Myanmar society, including its Buddhist majority. In this sense, the hope articulated through Psalm 23 is not a private consolation only reserved for Catholics but is offered, through the Church's public invitation

41 Peter C. Phan, *Being Religious Interreligiously: Asian Perspectives on Interfaith Dialogue* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2004), 61.

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to entire nation as it seeks an end to the cycle of violence and injustice in Myanmar.

Pastoral Recommendations: Toward a Shepherding Leadership Rooted in Psalm 23

If Psalm 23 can be regarded as providing a theological framework for hope amid desolation, it can also be regarded as implicitly offering a model for pastoral leadership. In this model, Church leaders are called to embody the shepherd's provision, protection and accompaniment within the limits imposed by the current crisis in Myanmar. It is evident that this framework gives rise to a number of concrete pastoral applications. Firstly, the use of Psalm 23 in catechesis and liturgy could be intentionally expanded. Short reflections, prayer services, and small-group sharing sessions could be built around each verse of the psalm in IDP camps and displaced communities. These sessions would invite participants to name where they have experienced the "green pastures," "still waters," or a "table prepared" even amid hardship and desolation. This would help people process trauma and recognize God's grace even in the midst of hardship.

Second, because clergy face severe movement restrictions in conflict zones, many communities find themselves without regular pastoral presence that becomes pastoral urgent in Myanmar. However, the image of the shepherd in Psalm 23 is not limited to a single figure standing at a distance from the flock; rather, it suggests an ongoing, daily presence among the sheep. Where the priests and religious cannot reach regularly in conflict zones, the catechists can serve day-to-day pastoral accompaniment, including basic spiritual care, psychosocial support and humanitarian aid, while remaining in communion with and supported by the Church in Myanmar.

Third, the Church's pastoral leadership has a role in providing psychological and spiritual accompaniments. The people who got the psychological problems including grief, anxiety, and trauma of witnessing violence such as the killing of Fr. Donald Martin Ye Naing Win, it is important to integrate the fundamental training in psychological and counseling programs alongside with spiritual and catechetical formation. This would enable the religious leaders and catechists to recognize the signs of severe distress and respond with appropriate psychological accompaniment while continuing to support the spiritual accompaniments such as Eucharist, prayers and devotions for the people in conflict zones.

The Church's leadership, particularly bishops, priests, and religious figures with greater visibility and access to international networks, has a continuing responsibility to speak out for the protection of civilians. Cardinal Charles Bo and the Archbishop of Mandalay have already done this, calling for urgent humanitarian aid in response to attack on churches, monasteries and civilian communities where pastoral act consistent with the shepherd's role of protecting the flock, even when that protection cannot prevent every harm. Taken together, these pastoral application imply that the hope offered by Psalm 23 is meant through the structures of care and leadership, rather than merely being proclaimed in preaching. Therefore, the experience of being accompanied by a shepherd who provides, protects and remains present manifest in the daily life of Myanmar Catholics.

The pastoral approach in this paper has been met with criticism and a responsible discussion of the subject must acknowledge this directly. Jon Sobrino, SJ, a liberation theologian says that crucified people who suffer unjust, structural death not through accident but through the organized violence

of political systems must be taken down from the cross through concrete acts of justice, not simply accompanied in their suffering.[42] From this view, a pastoral response centered on Psalm 23 might raise the following question: is the Church by offering prayer and spiritual accompaniment to displaced Myanmar Catholics and providing the genuine pastoral care or is it offering the spiritual consolation without dealing with political and structural dimensions of the crisis? A Church that engages in prayer with displaced without first addressing the causes of their displacement may, as Sobrino warns, offer a false sense of comfort. This type of comfort, which makes the church feel calm without looking at the reasons why the flock left, is not helpful.

This paper does not ignore that criticism. The recommendations above: teaching catechism in IDP camps, accompanying lay people in their daily lives, helping people deal with trauma, and asking religious leaders to speak up are not offered as a complete response to the crisis in Myanmar, and they should not be understood that way. They are what the Church can do now, using its own resources and purpose, for people who need accompaniment today. However, Sobrino's challenge shows us something the Psalm itself insists on that the God of Psalm 23 is not a God who will just make us feel comfortable. The shepherd leads the flock through the valley and out the other side, toward the table set in the presence of enemies, towards a situation where abundance is possible even though the enemies have not disappeared. Psalm 23 verse 6 ends with a dwelling, not an escape. The psalm offer hope, not for an easy life, but for a better future – a future of justice and peace. The Church is called to work this future happen, while also helping those who are suffering now. Accompaniment and

42 Jon Sobrino, SJ, *The Principle of Mercy: Taking the Crucified People from the Cross* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1994), 50.

advocacy are not competing priorities in Myanmar's situation. They belong together, and Sobrino's challenge shows that the pastoral Church must never mistake the first for a substitute for the second.

Conclusion

To sum up, in this paper, the author shows how the profound resilience of Myanmar Catholics in times of ongoing political turmoil, such as *coup d'état*, civil war, and economic hardship, as well as how Psalm 23 serves an important role of hope and resilience for the people of Myanmar. The passage "even though I walk through the darkest valley, I fear no evil for you are with me" resonates with the daily lives and struggles of Myanmar Catholics, providing comfort and perseverance. In times of desolation and ongoing crisis in Myanmar, the message of Psalm 23 assures that God is always with us, even in the darkest valley. Although the Myanmar people are facing the challenges of violence, displacement, and economic hardship, they still have faith and resilience that gives inspiration to all believers.

Moreover, "The Lord is my shepherd" in Psalm 23 offers God's protection and provision for God's believers even in times of suffering, which offers a beacon of hope for the people of Myanmar. By sustaining faith, solidarity with displaced people from conflict areas, and supporting them with community effort, one can build hope for a future of peace and justice in Myanmar. The challenges are immense, but the spirit of hope nurtured by faith remains a powerful tool for positive changes. Indeed, the Lord is our shepherd, and God's presence may offer the promise of peace and justice in Myanmar.

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