

EDITORIAL INTRODUCTION: DAWN BEYOND THE DARKNESS

We now live in a world beset by war, violence, and despair. In the global context, we see nations rising against one another. In the local context, we suffer the effects of long historical turmoil combined with the effects of global disarray. We are living in gloomy times. This set of papers, mostly from Dakateo's conference entitled "*Pagbubukang Liwayway/Banagbanag: Rethinking Theology amidst Violence*," is now both prompt and prophetic. This collection not only speaks of hope amidst violence but also features theologians who enact hope through theological activity that ushers in the dawn. Their works challenge readers to defy conventions on gender and masculinity, to confront homonegativity as a darkness in the way the gospel itself is taught, to engage other disciplines like social work and community development in doing theology, and to take an *ad extra* and an *ad intra* perspective. These theologians prophetically name various forms of violence, difficulties, and oppression in our midst, and write to speak out against these, and they show how we can imagine, envision, and proceed differently in ways that bring about the dawn and defy the darkness of our times.

An insistence on dawn defying darkness, throughout different contexts, is a common thread among select conference papers in this journal.

In the context of a Philippine social milieu marked by poverty and extrajudicial killings, often against the poor, especially during Rodrigo Roa Duterte's presidency from 2016 to 2022, Jessica Joy Candelario, in "Men and Masculinities in the War on Drugs: Toward a Gender-Integrated Ecclesial Response" pays particular attention to how masculinities have been performed among Filipinos, and how violence plays a role in these. By looking

at Jesus Christ and contemporary examples of prophetic responses, she constructs ideal masculine responses in the face of violence that call for a renewal in church life.

Raphael Augustine L. Yabut also focuses on gender in “Queering Religious Education in the Philippines: Undoing Violence against LGBTQI+ Students in the Classroom.” This article features a reflection on how homo-negativity in religious education and theological imagination has sustained queer violence, including narratives and reports from queer individuals. The paper ends with a hopeful call for a queer pedagogy that interrupts oppressive epistemologies and fosters queer thriving.

The challenge of facing violence and fostering hope in the classroom is also taken up by Edwin B. Odulio in “Scripture in the Classroom: A Critical Evaluation of Current Practices and a Proposal for Narrative Change.” This paper discusses literal and moralizing ways by which scripture is interpreted and explained in religious education, exemplified by some textbooks, which in turn sustain different forms of violence such as exclusion, gender bias, and marginalization in educational spaces. The paper proposes adopting a method from social work and community development, the Narrative Change Approach (NCA), particularly the Four Baskets model, as a hopeful and more life-giving way of reading scriptures.

Moving closer to home, and from a previous conference on synodality, Noel G. Judith, Jr., in “‘It Is the Council’s Decision’: Synodality, Clerical Authority, and the Termination of Lay Mission Partners in a Clergy-Led Religious Congregation,” tackles particular experiences of lay missionaries being terminated by a congregation without prior consultation. This paper incisively discusses the various perspectives surrounding this event, considering how a congregation is both a civil and ecclesial institution. The paper articulates the problem of clericalism and the lack of moral accountability in the issue and reiterates the relevance of synodality

and lay empowerment to usher hope into a church challenged by such real and concrete internal problems.

This collection also includes two supplemental essays that have emerged from the conference.

Dakateo or *Damdaming Katoliko sa Pagteteolohiya* or the Catholic Theological Society of the Philippines is a professional organization of Filipino theologians who try to develop theologies that are culturally relevant, contextual, and liberating. The essay by Levy L. Lanaria narrates Dakateo's conference last November 2025 in Cebu. It emphasizes how theologians have grappled with various forms of violence and have found resources in Christian faith and Filipino culture to speak of eschatological hope.

This hope can be symbolized by a light that does not wait for the darkness to end, which is an image Archbishop Alberto S. Uy, Archbishop of Cebu, reminds us of from the book of Isaiah. His homily, also included in this journal, conveys his reflections on hope and how theologians are called to work towards the dawn by becoming Christ-like theologians who are brave, kind, and courageous. He narrates the example of a young man, Jayboy, whose heroism while Typhoon Tino ravaged Cebu, stood for what it means to perform hope amidst fear and chaos.

Contemporary philosopher Byung Chul Han recognizes that the deepest root of hope is transcendental and appreciates how hope fosters collective action. He says this based on his reflections on history and the present times. Moreover, he says, "Hope, in this deep and powerful sense, is not the same as joy that things are going well, or willingness to invest in enterprises that are obviously headed for early success, but, rather, an ability to work for something because it is good, not just because it stands a chance to succeed."¹ Through writing, the theologians behind these papers

1. Byung-Chul Han, *The Spirit of Hope* (Polity Press, 2024), Hoping and Acting, e-book.

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have enacted collaborative hope. Their works are a contribution towards social and ecological change, where transformation is not guaranteed by optimism that is blind to suffering and difficulty, but by a deeper Easter conviction that God is with us in our efforts, brokenness, and struggles, fulfilling in us and ushering in the eschatological flourishing of all through the Spirit.²

If the reader finds the insights in this collection inspiring, our hope as editors is that they also become a beacon of hope in their contexts. We re-echo what Pope Leo XIV asserts in *Dilexi Te*: “Our love and our deepest convictions need to be continually cultivated, and we do so through our concrete actions. Staying in the realm of ideas and theories, while not giving them expression through frequent and practical acts of charity, will eventually cause even our most cherished hopes and aspirations to weaken and fade away.”³

Dominador F. Bombongan Jr., PhD

*School of Ministry of the Diocese of Stockton
California, USA*

Ramon D. Echica

Cebu City

Rachel Joyce Marie O. Sanchez, PhD

Ateneo de Manila University

2. D. A. Lane, *Keeping Hope Alive: Stirrings in Christian Theology* (Paulist Press, 1996), 18, 19, 60; N. T. Wright, *Surprised by Hope Rethinking Heaven, the Resurrection, and the Mission of the Church* (HarperCollins e-books, 2009), 264, 275; Paul J. Schutz, *A Theology of Flourishing: The Fullness of Life for All Creation* (Orbis Books, 2025), 90, 136–37.

3. Leo XIV, “Dilexi Te,” Vatican, October 4, 2025, para. 119, http://www.vatican.va/content/leo-xiv/en/apost_exhortations/documents/20251004-dilexi-te.html.