In retrospect, a decade flashes by. So it has been with my decade as editor in chief of this journal; the incoming editor waits in the wings.

My predecessor, Michael Fahey, in his last editorial (December 2005), sketched the journal’s development from a journal aimed largely at Catholic seminary faculty and students to a Catholic research journal for an ecumenical, interreligious, and worldwide audience of professional theologians. Fahey concluded with a prayer that the journal would “continue to thrive” in this status. My first editorial (March 2006) tried to articulate a status quaestionis as I peered toward the future through a glass darkly. What struck me then was the speed of global changes that were challenging theologians to become adept at discerning how and where the Holy Spirit is actively leading the people of God—in truth all peoples—into an indiscernible future.

In the past decade changes seem to be accelerating. Developments in technology continue apace, inspiring hope in some, terror in others. Today no country on earth is untouched by forces unleashed by the 9/11 attacks and the US’s aggressive response. Not since World Wars I and II has the world seen the current scale of migration. The Pew Research Center’s “facts about world migration” show that the entire population of the world seems “on the move,” some voluntarily, most forced by the need to survive; many leaving homelands, others shifting to make room for arrivals.

In this situation, what is the Holy Spirit saying to believers everywhere? To the world’s religions, churches, the Catholic Church? How are theologians responding? Pope Francis proposes some replies to these questions. *Lumen fidei*, his first encyclical, written largely by Pope Benedict XVI as the third of his trilogy on love, hope, and faith, exhorts us to a renewal of faith in an age when it is declining in the West, even as it grows in the two-thirds world. The pope argues for faith as a beacon that illumes the journey of all peoples (*LF* no. 4).

Francis’s other writings tell us how he sees himself called to lead the Church. His exhortation *Evangelii gaudium* and his encyclical *Laudato si’* on the environment seem to have come “out of the blue,” conveying a virtual bouleversement relative to the two previous pontiffs, and rather more evocative of the spirit of Pope John XXIII. As such, his writings invite us to a renewal of faith, hope, and love based on God’s promise to be with us always, empowering us to proclaim even more in deed than in word the perennial gospel of Jesus Christ, Emmanuel: “be shepherds with the smell of sheep.”
For believers in God, the eternal, changeless one, which beliefs in our changing times remain the same and how? What can we count on as history develops? Certainly our identity (our “soulishness”) remains. But just as certainly our perceptions change as we engage ever-new experiences and discoveries, some exhilarating with promise, others shaking us to the core.

For Christians, the primary, guiding presence amid change has been our trinitarian God incarnate in Jesus Christ and abiding with us through the Holy Spirit. That presence is embodied for us in the community of the church, God’s people, who are inspired by their saints and led by the college of bishops with and under Peter, enunciating what we hold in faith, hope, and love but also what we resist and reject. Though tossed by history’s storms and sometimes damaged, Peter’s bark remains a sure vessel for our course.

The Church trusts that conclaves called to elect popes are guided by the Holy Spirit. Few observers expected Jorge Mario Bergoglio to be chosen to lead the Church at this moment in history. Yet here he is with, it seems, a mandate to draw the whole Church to a way of being that calls not only Catholics but all people of faith to discern and follow the promptings of God’s Spirit in the world. As Cardinal Kasper has pointed out, Francis is the first pope to have “grown up in a multicultural megapolis in the South,” which suits him well to lead the Church in this age of transmigration. An increasingly globalized, diverse Church requires church teaching to adopt a post-Vatican II theology familiar to the Argentine Francis: a “theology of the people” that takes seriously the council’s affirmation of the Spirit’s presence in the world within but also beyond all the churches. Indeed, the new locus theologicus for the Church is all creation—what has been, what is, what will be. This has always been true for our creator God, but the Church has not always recognized it. Laudato si’ incites us to awaken to this reality and embrace the conversion needed for us to engage with God in countering our most pressing threats and bringing humankind to its promised fullness.

Theological Studies’ incoming editor in chief, Paul Crowley, professor of systematic theology at Santa Clara University, will have the privilege and challenge of helping theologians worldwide vet their best lights on God’s providence for us. My prayer is that his efforts will surpass those of his predecessors in assisting theologians—and, through them, this journal’s readers—to track the Spirit’s movements. If I might single out one area where I long to see marked growth, it would be in service of what Francis hopes for in Evangelii gaudium no. 103: “to create still broader opportunities for a more incisive female presence in the church,” as the Church desperately needs the “distinctive skill sets which they, more than men, tend to possess . . . the special concern which women show to others.” I do not believe Laudato si’ can bear real fruit without the leadership of the world’s women.

Paul Crowley, may your tenure be blessed!

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