As we go to press, the crisis besetting the Roman Catholic Church continues to unfold. The magnitude of the developments presents a challenge to comprehending not only the fact of unspeakable crimes against youth, but the sheer number of them, the majority having been committed by priests publicly vowed to chastity. Add to this the pervasiveness of the cover-up by bishops and religious superiors over many decades, we find ourselves at a moment of judgment. The words of Ezekiel (34:7–10, NAB) seem particularly apt:

Therefore, shepherds, hear the word of the LORD:

As I live, says the Lord GOD,

because my sheep have been given over to pillage,

and because my sheep have become food for every wild beast,

for lack of a shepherd;

because my shepherds did not look after my sheep,

but pastured themselves and did not pasture my sheep;

because of this, shepherds, hear the word of the LORD:

Thus says the Lord GOD:

I swear I am coming against these shepherds.

I will claim my sheep from them

and put a stop to their shepherding my sheep

so that they may no longer pasture themselves.

I will save my sheep,

that they may no longer be food for their mouths.
These are times when the words of ancient prophets can begin to help us give vent to the thirst for justice that recent disclosures have stirred. Yet these crimes and their cover up have also unleashed a torrent of frustration over matters that have long been bottled up in the life of the church but which can no longer be evaded. Simultaneously, the crisis has also opened up long-festering wounds and ugly polarizations in the Body of Christ, with some working, tacitly or explicitly, for the destabilization of the current papal ministry, thus posing an implicit threat to the unity of the church itself.

Despite all this disturbing news, or perhaps because of it, theologians face an opportunity to give serious thought to how the wisdom of the tradition can be put to good use. First, of course, we must address the immediate crisis at hand, including serious listening to the abused. As a recent statement by the Board of Directors of the Catholic Theological Society of America has framed it:

Our task as theologians is to put our scholarly expertise to work to explore why what has happened in the church has happened, and to promote steps that must be taken to prevent these atrocities from recurring, or being tolerated or covered up, in the future. This will necessitate listening to and learning from all those affected, especially victims and their loved ones. It will also require looking carefully at clerical abuse of power in all its manifestations in order to discern ways to restore the trust of the people in the ministers of the church, the faithful majority of whom are also suffering in their own way from the fall-out of these latest revelations.¹

In addition to attending to this first and mandatory task, other dimensions of the church’s life must be put on the table for careful, critical, and constructive consideration: fundamental ecclesiology; governing structures of the church; the theological and spiritual dimensions of celibacy in relation to the vocation to priestly service; complicated entanglements of sexuality, power, and ambition that permeate the clerical state; intellectual honesty about church teaching on sexuality, and the construction of gender and sexuality peculiar to Catholicism that permeates it; the implications of continuing in our time to exclude women from ministry in and leadership of the church; the paucity of a theology of the child in our theological imagination, and other questions.

In order to address these questions, theologians must not stop at the obvious. This is a time to sound the depths, with an aim toward a rediscovery of hope. First, we have need for an understanding of the long arcs of history, difficult as those can be to discern, so that we can begin to grasp what has happened and where we currently stand. The article by Stephen R. Schloesser, SJ, in our September issue² is an excellent example of the kind of historical scholarship that is needed in order to understand not only the present moment, but also how any crisis in the church emerges within a trajectory of history, and rarely as an isolated, singular intra-ecclesial

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phenomenon. Equally, we need to attend to the perennial questions about evil and sin that show themselves in abundance now in the church, but also how we can undertake an examination of the truth that leads to justice and reconciliation. Not least, this is a time to delve into the very foundation of Christian faith, the Resurrection, and the real hope that resurrection faith promises. The creative power of the Resurrection must be recovered in the life of the church. Yet, in all of this work, it will be imperative to adopt a posture of humility, for even if we could arrive at some ecclesiastical promised land, we would need to adopt the realism and even the "Christian pessimism" that Karl Rahner reminded us is essential for an honest Christian life, both personal and ecclesial. And we would also need to invoke a Metzian "dangerous memory" of Jesus himself, whose questioning of the religious nostrums of his time led to his brutal execution and the apparent liquidation of his dreams – a memory it seems that some quarters of the church may have forgotten.

All the more reason, then, for finding again an authentic Christian hope. For the sake of the church's ever-new witness to the Gospel, Theological Studies will host some focused theological thinking emanating from the current crisis. In line with that commitment, we will be dedicating a special issue to the crisis in the coming year. Meanwhile, the present issue rounds out our commemoration of 1968 with three essays on Humanae Vitae. Remote as that encyclical may seem from our present situation, understanding the theological and political dynamics at work within the encyclical itself can go far toward helping us understand how we might address the present ecclisial moment. Richard Gaillardetz undertakes an analysis of the encyclical in terms of its impact on the life of the church and its ecclesiology; Gerald Coleman, PSS, places it within the context of subsequent church teaching, especially that of Pope Francis; and Emily Reimer-Barry offers a long-needed feminist appraisal that concludes with a call to intellectual honesty about the situation of women in daily life and in the life of the church. In addition to several other excellent essays, Kathleen McManus, OP, offers a theological meditation on the experience of women in solidarity with one another as presenting an ethical imperative for the church. Both of these features are salutary reminders that the current crisis of the church has as much to do with the systemic exclusion of lay people and women from the imagination, ministry, and governance of the church, as well as with the inner pathologies of clericalism.

This issue also contains two articles dealing with Jesus in varying ways, help round out the issue. The first, by Neil Ormerod and Christiaan Jacobs-Vandegeer, explores the "beatific vision" of Jesus through Lonergan's treatment of the psychological analogy of the Trinity, unfolding new ways of thinking about Jesus' experience of God as love, and by extension, of the Christian's aesthetic experience of Jesus. And Christopher D. Jones examines the importance of the moral theory of Anglican theologian Kenneth McIntosh, whose work has contributed so much to a horizon of hope for the church through a reclaiming of historical consciousness and of the historical dynamism of theology. John O'Malley, whose scholarship has contributed so much to a horizon of hope for the church through a reclaiming of historical consciousness and of the historical dynamism of theology, has helped so many of us appreciate the long arc of history that we desperately need to recall now. His towering work will stand the test of time.
Kirk, an important thinker often overlooked in Catholic ethical discussion, yet one who could help in the navigation of some of our current moral issues, especially as these seep into our understanding of the church and its mission. This leads to a Christian moral theology rooted in the person of Jesus himself.

Finally, among the many excellent articles in this issue is the contribution of Innocent Smith, OP, who limns the theological and liturgical arc between Thomas Aquinas on mercy and Pope Francis’ mission to bring the mercy of the Gospel into the life of the church. As Francis reminds us in Misericordiae Vultus, mercy is the face of God. But this is a bold mercy, rooted in the transformative power of the Resurrection, which draws new life out of what is dead. Remembrance of this mercy, still being offered the church today, might help us tackle the work that lies before us.

Paul G. Crowley, SJ
Editor-in-Chief

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