

## From the Editor's Desk

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Two years ago, in June of 2022, I wrote this in my editor's note:

As this issue goes to press, the world watches in heart-wrenching dismay the violence being inflicted upon the people of Ukraine, staggering violations of human dignity reported in disturbing textual detail and hauntingly graphic images. Over fifty years after Paul VI's 1965 exhortation to the United Nations, "No more war, war never again," Pope Francis has cuttingly condemned this most recent conflict as "a cruel and senseless war," where "the powerful decide and the poor die." War is "a barbarous and sacrilegious act!"<sup>1</sup>

In February of this year, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) put the number of civilian casualties of the war at more 30,000. A US intelligence report declassified in December 2023 estimated that casualties among Russian troops are around 315,000. Meanwhile, a new horror is unfolding in the Middle East. Gaza officials report that at least 30,000 people have been killed in the Israel–Hamas war. A statement from the Jesuit Curia in Rome mourned the inability of the parties involved and the international community to end the crisis:

Almost six months of war in Gaza, and the guns have not fallen silent. We, the members of the Society of Jesus (the Jesuits), like so many other Catholics, Christians, men and women of all faiths and non-believers, refuse to be silent. Our voices continue to be lifted up in prayer, in lament, in protest at the death and destruction that continue to reign in Gaza and other territories in Israel/Palestine, spilling over into the surrounding countries of the Middle East. . . .

We join our voice to that of the Holy Father, Pope Francis, who has repeatedly warned: "War is a defeat! Every war is a defeat" (Angelus, 8 October 2023). We repeat our call for an immediate ceasefire, for the release of all the 7 October hostages, for negotiations and for the beginning of a process that will bring freedom, liberty and justice for all in the Middle East, the only road to true peace.

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1. Christopher Steck, "From the Editor's Desk," *Theological Studies* 83, no. 2 (June 1, 2022): 197–200. <https://doi.org/10.1177/00405639221097161>.

My initial plan for the editor's column was to reflect on this violent landscape with the hope, perhaps vain, that I might be able to add some helpful insight from a Catholic theological perspective to the extensive commentary already made.

And then, on February 25, insurgents attacked a Catholic church in Burkina Faso, leaving at least fifteen people dead. On March 2 and 3, armed gangs stormed two prisons in Haiti, releasing over 4,000 prisoners. The aftermath has further crippled Haiti's ability to govern and protect its people from the violence of armed gangs. Most recently, as we go to press, an ISIS terrorist attack on a music hall in Moscow has left at least 143 dead.

Instead of attempting to bring some new insight into the world's madness, I offer a prayer, the Collect for the Votive Mass, "In Time of War or Civil Disturbance":

O God, merciful and strong,  
 Who crush wars and cast down the proud,  
 Be pleased to banish violence swiftly from our midst  
 And to wipe away all tears,  
 So that we may all truly deserve to be called your children.  
 Amen.

## **In This Issue**

William O'Neill, SJ's "Re-enchanting the World" unpacks the insights of Pope Francis's critique of the "technocratic paradigm." Against the temptation to reduce prudence to a technical expertise, Francis provides the language, even poetry, necessary to re-enchant our world—to reimbue it with those core values that are both Catholic and catholic and necessary for the world's flourishing: "the option for the poor, intergenerational responsibility, and recognition of the intrinsic value of nonhuman nature."

Are there other metaphors besides that of sight that can help us interpret the beatific vision? Against critics who argue Balthasar's account is inconsistent or at odds with traditional accounts, Li-Wei Liu's "Is There an End to the Theatrical Play?" shows that Balthasar creatively reimagines, or "transposes," Christ's direct vision of God into an aesthetic-dramatic framework that better highlights the interplay of divine love at its heart.

Since the 1960s, the pastoral efforts of the Congolese Catholic Church have centered on the development of lay-led base communities. In "The People Who Do All Things Together," J. J. Carney presents the findings of his study of these communities and argues that they "exemplify Vatican II's people of God ecclesiology and Africa's image of the church as the family of God." In doing so, they offer a model for how the church in the Global North can become "a more synodal and dialogical church that empowers laity, provides opportunities for women's leadership, and integrates faith and social concern."

In her “Eighty Years after *Mystici Corporis Christi*,” Elyse Raby examines the layers of discussions surrounding the mystical body theologies of the early twentieth century. She shows how appeals to a mystical body theology were intertwined with theological endeavors “to reunite the sacramental-eucharistic, social-juridical, and christological-soteriological dimensions of the church.” The term’s strength is its weakness: “the rich equivocality” allowed it to be used in these attempts at synthesis but also made it vulnerable to a lack of “systematic clarity.”

In the December 2023 issue of *Theological Studies*, Emmett O’Regan argued that the First Vatican Council excluded the possibility of a heretical pope. In this issue, we revisit that claim in a rich exchange between Christian Washburn and Emmett O’Regan that highlights with precision subtle distinctions and contextualized discussions among the Council Fathers (*Quaestio Disputata*). The richness of the exchange between these two scholars and their respect for the interpretive complexity of the historical discussions provide us an apt standard for investigations into past conciliar teachings. Above all, they remind us why ahistorical claims—made with alleged clarity—regarding what the church does or does not teach on an issue should be met with *prima facie* circumspection. Regardless of which side readers end up agreeing with, they will find the exchange illuminating of the topic.

Christopher Steck, SJ  
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