

## INTRODUCTION

The reality of the Kingdom and the experience of exile define the contours of Christian identity and commitment, and they have since the beginning. The believer stands at the crossroads between earth and heaven, feet planted on the earth, and eyes fixed on heaven. “The Church, even now, is the Kingdom of Christ and the Kingdom of heaven,” St. Augustine says again and again in his masterwork of political theology, *The City of God*.<sup>1</sup> In the Church, eternity has begun in time, ordering the human to the divine, the visible to the invisible, action to contemplation, and the earthly city to the city of God yet to come.

“In my Father’s house are many rooms ... I go and prepare a place for you,” Jesus said. “I will come again and will take you to myself. ... And you know the way where I am going.”<sup>2</sup> This promise is the basis of Christian hope. The Kingdom has come, yet the world does not recognize its king. So the believer exists in exile. In the midst of nations whose rulers still conspire against the Lord’s anointed, we make our slow pilgrimage to the Father’s house, along the way hoping to find our king returning.

The New Testament writers see the Christian life as a time of exile and sojourning, using terms associated in the Old Testament with the pilgrimage of Abraham, the wanderings of the Israelites, and their dispersion among the nations.<sup>3</sup> Christians are a people with no country, strangers and exiles in a world that is not their home, like a “scattering of seeds” among the nations—which is the literal meaning of “Diaspora,” the name given first to the Jewish community in exile and later to the Church. “For here we have no lasting city, but we seek the city which is to come,” as the Letter to the Hebrews puts it.<sup>4</sup>

It is no coincidence that the next line in Hebrews is an exhortation to sacrificial worship and service to those in need: “Through him, then, let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God. ... Do not neglect to do good and to share what you have, for such sacrifices are pleasing to God.”<sup>5</sup> In our exile, the heavenly kingdom is made manifest on earth in a sacramental way through the sacrificial liturgy of the Eucharist. And though our citizenship is in heaven,<sup>6</sup> we are called

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1 St. Augustine, *The City of God*, Bk. 20, Chap. 9. Text in *A Select Library of Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Church*, vol. 2, ed. Philip Schaff (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1997); compare Bk. 16, Chaps. 2, 3.

2 John 14:2–5.

3 See 1 Pet. 1:1, 17; 2:11; James 1:1, in which believers are called *paroikia* (“strangers,” “resident aliens”) and *parepidēmos* compare; Gen. 23:4; Exod. 2:22; Lev. 25:23; 1 Chron. 29:15; Ps. 39:12.

4 Heb. 11:13; 13:14.

5 Heb. 13:15–16.

6 Phil. 3:20; Eph. 2:12, 19.

to sanctify the city of our exile through our sacrifices and renunciations for our neighbor and our God.

As Roman authorities quickly came to understand, “Jesus is Lord,” is far more than a private confession of faith. It amounts to a *de facto* disestablishment of every other god, including the gods of the empire. Christ’s command, “Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s, and to God the things that are God’s,”<sup>7</sup> strips Caesar of his self-proclaimed divinity, and subordinates the power of every earthly authority to the power of the Father and Creator of the world. There are not two kingdoms, but only one, the Church, the household of God, built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets. And as there are not two kingdoms, there can only be one King.

The cry of the early North African martyr: *Deus major est quam imperatore*—“God is greater than the emperor”<sup>8</sup>—points to some of the larger issues and themes of political theology that we take up in this volume of *Letter & Spirit*. These themes are introduced in **Scott W. Hahn’s** contribution, “Liturgy and Empire: Prophetic Historiography and Faith in Exile in 1-2 Chronicles.” Hahn shows us that Chronicles is a canonical theology that offers a typological reading of Israel’s history from creation to the exile. The Chronicler is writing for the people of Jerusalem and Judah in the first generation after their return from exile in Babylon. They have come home to a city in ruins, to rebuild their Temple and their lives.

Yet, in many ways their condition is more perplexing and ambiguous than that of exile. How are they to live under the domination of a foreign power? What are they to make of the divine promises sworn to their ancestors? How are they to persist in the faith of their fathers? The same questions resonated with the early Christians living in a hostile empire they identified with Babylon. And these questions should resonate with believers today, whether they live under the repression of atheist regimes or amid the increasingly belligerent and intolerant secularism of the West.

**John Bergsma** also writes with these broader questions in mind. His “Cultic Kingdoms in Conflict in the Book of Daniel,” takes us back to the original exile and explores how Daniel and his Hebrew companions kept the faith in Babylon. In Bergsma’s reading, the narrative tension in Daniel is essentially cultic—what is going on is a conflict between the Kingdom of God and the Kingdom of Man, between the worship and service of the true and living God, and the totalitarian fealty demanded by the idols of the state. His contribution teases out the liturgical symbolism in the depictions of Daniel’s persecution and reveals the development of an important biblical perspective—the idea of the believer’s life as a liturgical self-offering. The witness of Daniel and his three friends in the fiery furnace, and

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7 Mark 12:17.

8 Text in Maureen A. Tilley, trans., *Donatist Martyr Stories: The Church in Conflict in Roman North Africa* (Liverpool: Liverpool University, 1997), 37.

later Daniel in the lion's den, functions as a kind of "alternate liturgy" for God's people in exile, one that advances God's designs for worship, namely his recognition as the true God among the nations.

The liturgical consciousness we see beginning in Daniel becomes a key dimension of New Testament spirituality, as **Jeremy Driscoll, O. S. B.**, shows in his "Worship in the Spirit of *Logos*: Romans 12:1–2 and the Source and Summit of Christian Life." Moving from an exegesis of St. Paul's appeal ("Present your bodies as a living sacrifice ... which is your spiritual worship.") Driscoll traces the emergence of a christological and eucharistic sensibility in the early interpretive and liturgical tradition. Believers are to offer their bodies in self-denial and sacrifice in imitation of Christ's sacrifice on the cross, a sacrifice they participate in through the celebration of the Eucharist. He shows the fullest development of this eucharistic self-understanding in the witness of the early martyrs who, in their resistance to the unconscionable demands of the empire, saw their lives literally "as a sacrificial offering, an experience shaped by their worship, by the existential encounter with the power of Christ's sacrifice in the eucharistic memorial of his death."

The true nature of Christian sacrifice is also a leading theme in **Rodrigo J. Morales'** contribution, "A Liturgical Conversion of the Imagination: Worship and Ethics in 1 Corinthians." Morales explores how Paul's understanding of the Church as the Temple of God founded upon Christ shaped his ethical teaching—and how the demands of Christian conversion required believers to separate themselves from the immorality and idolatry of the everyday culture around them. Morales shows how Paul's teaching is rooted in a reinterpretation of Jewish scriptural traditions and how his exclusive understanding of Christian worship suggested an unavoidable challenge to the state-mandated worship of the imperial gods and the Emperor.

**Brant Pitre's** study of the historical Jesus examines a dimension of his teaching that has not drawn much attention until now. "Jesus, the Messianic Banquet, and the Kingdom of God," explores the relationship between the Kingdom and the heavenly banquet anticipated in some strands of Jewish expectation for the Messiah. Pitre's analysis of the Jewish source material helps us to better see the continuity between the New Testament Church and Jewish hopes for the ingathering of exiled Israel and the restoration of the Davidic kingdom. The institution of the Eucharist at the Last Supper becomes both the symbol and the catalyst for this long-awaited ingathering. The Church emerges in this reading as the Kingdom proclaimed by Jesus and the Eucharist comes more sharply into view as the messianic banquet foretold in the prophets.

In "Charity and Empire: Is Trinitarian Monotheism Violent?" **Matthew Levering** enters into one of the most vexing questions in the academy today. As posed in academic theology, the argument is blunt—that monotheistic belief

inherently requires the violent extermination of believers in other gods; that it is a theology of empire, historically used by earthly rulers as an ideology of conquest. Levering returns to the theology of St. Thomas Aquinas to confront this argument. Focusing on Aquinas' use of Scripture in developing his teaching on charity and the Trinity, Levering finds no inherent imperatives to exclude or repress the "other"—but the opposite. Aquinas' belief that the self-giving love of the Trinity lies at the heart of reality establishes the urgent necessity of bearing witness to that love and sharing that love with others, including enemies.

In our "Notes" section in this volume, we continue to explore dimensions of Christian existence in exile. How are we to read the Scriptures faithfully in order to know God's purposes and plan? What is the relationship between our worship of God and our obligations to our neighbors? **Robert Barron** contrasts St. Irenaeus of Lyons' approach to Scripture with the dominant model of doing theology in the academy, which limits itself to considering only the historical and literary dimensions of the text. Examining Irenaeus and the Second Vatican Council's decree on Scripture, *Dei Verbum*, Barron argues for an integral approach to Scripture that unites the historical and literary aspects of the texts with their theological meaning and liturgical purpose. **David Fagerberg's** contribution is a retrieval of one of the most intriguing figures in the Catholic liturgical renewal and social justice movements of the twentieth century, Virgil Michel. Fagerberg finds in Michel's thought a fertile synthesis of the Church's concern for the right worship of God and the right ordering of human society, suggesting that in the Eucharist we have a model for the communion and fellowship that should obtain on earth as in heaven.

These questions continue in the "Tradition & Traditions" section of this volume. **Jeremy Holmes** gives us the first-ever English translation of **St. Thomas Aquinas'** commentary on 2 Thessalonians, St. Paul's famous meditation on holiness, the end times, and the Antichrist. **Louis Bouyer** provides a magisterial reading of the scriptural theme of the conflict between Satan and Christ and their respective "economies of divine government." **Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger / Pope Benedict XVI** concludes our volume with a biblical reflection on the questions of political action and Christian faith, reprinted with permission of Ignatius Press.

The question that Benedict raises, about the *morality of exile*, is the primary question of political theology—how is the Christian to live *in* the world, but not *of* the world? The classic answer was given in the second-century Letter to Diognetus,

Christians are indistinguishable from other men either by nationality, language or customs. ... And yet there is something extraordinary about their lives. They live in their own countries as though they were only passing through. They play their full role as citizens ... but for them their homeland, wherever it may be, is a foreign country. ... They pass their days upon earth, but

they are citizens of heaven. ... In a word: we may say that the Christian is to the world what the soul is to the body. As the soul is present in every part of the body, while remaining distinct from it, so Christians are found in all the cities of the world, but cannot be identified with the world. ... Such is the Christian's lofty and divinely appointed function, from which he is not permitted to excuse himself.<sup>9</sup>

Ultimately, the questions of political theology and faith in exile lead us back again to Augustine and his contrast between the *civitas terrena* ("earthly city") and the *civitas Dei* ("city of God"). There is a humility at the core of Augustinian realism, a humility that enables us to resist the temptations of our exile. The first temptation is to mistake the state for the Kingdom and to seek salvation through political means. Augustinian realism becomes a kind of social corollary to St. Paul's soteriology—as the Law does not justify us, so politics can never save us, and Christians should beware of political projects or regimes expressed in messianic or soteriological terms.

As we resist the seductions of the state that gestures toward the ultimate, we must also be on guard against the temptation to despair, the temptation that would lead us to flee the world and its corruptions, to withdraw into a privatized faith that would leave the world to its own devices as we wait for the new heavens and the new earth.<sup>10</sup> We do not put our trust in princes, and we do not draw our life from the state, but from the sacraments. Yet we are called to seek the welfare of the city to which we have been exiled.<sup>11</sup>

The Christian exile, like the exile of the Jews, does not represent the failure of God's plan but the transformation of his people's understanding of that plan. We see more clearly what Christ told to Pilate—that his Kingdom is not of this world. The Kingdom of God was never about earthly empire building. This is the lesson of the Old Testament. The Davidic kingdom was, at most, a prototype on earth of what Christ proclaimed as the Kingdom of heaven and established as the Church. The pilgrim Church on earth is the intermediary form of an everlasting kingdom that is already established in heaven. The Church triumphant, which dwells in heaven, reveals the essential identity and manifest glory of the Kingdom of Heaven. For there are not two churches, two kingdoms, and two liturgies, the one heavenly and the other earthly. Wherever the King is, there is the Kingdom. Wherever the Eucharist is, there is the King. Christ is enthroned in heavenly glory and yet humbly present in the Eucharist on earth.

9 Letter to Diognetus, 5; text in *The Didache, the Epistle of Barnabas, the Epistles and the Martyrdom of St. Polycarp, the Fragments of Papias, the Epistle to Diognetus*, trans. and annot., James A. Kleist, Ancient Christian Writers 6 (New York: Newman, 1948), 139.

10 Compare 2 Pet. 3:13.

11 Compare Jer. 9:5–7.

So we do not await a kingdom that is solely futuristic. In the eucharistic liturgy, the Kingdom comes to earth as it is in heaven. The Letter to the Hebrews speaks of the eucharistic liturgy and the Kingdom as a present reality, “You *have come* to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to innumerable angels in festal gathering, and to the assembly [*ekklēsia*] of the first-born who are enrolled in heaven ... and to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant. Therefore let us be grateful for receiving a Kingdom that cannot be shaken, and thus let us offer to God acceptable worship, with reverence and awe.”<sup>12</sup>

Where the Eucharist is, there is the Church, the Kingdom, made manifest and extended to earth by the Spirit, through the liturgy of the new covenant. But the Kingdom is manifested not only in the institutions of the Church and the celebration of the sacraments. The two cities that Augustine spoke of are not so much places on the map as they are habitations of the heart. The *civitas terrena* is governed by the love of self even to the contempt of God; the *civitas Dei*, by the love of God even to the contempt of self. The true manifestation of the Kingdom on earth, then, is found in the hearts of the faithful, in the divine charity that has been infused by the Spirit through the sacraments. The Kingdom is here and yet it is still to come in glory and perfection, the holy city, new Jerusalem coming down out of heaven from God and bringing with it a new heaven and a new earth.<sup>13</sup>

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12 Heb. 12:22–24, 28.

13 Rev. 21:1–2.