

Column

For quite some while now conspiracy theories involving a secretive power elite at work behind the scenes have been rife. A common belief is that the shadowy figures making up this group are bent on bringing down the present economic system, ending national sovereignty and establishing a new world order. With the advent of the coronavirus pandemic, such theories have only increased and become more widely dissimulated.

Is there any truth to these claims? Who knows?

I myself am agnostic on such matters, but I am absolutely convinced that there is a 'shadow government' of another sort, a government or rule that is unseen but very real.

I am thinking of the reign of Christ. One of the accusations made against the early Christians at Thessalonica was that they were claiming there was another king whose name was Jesus (Acts 17:7). Of course, those making this accusation were trying to get the followers of Jesus in trouble with the authorities, but what they said was true.

Forty days after Easter, Jesus took His little band of followers as far as the village of Bethany and was visibly parted from them in a cloud. Such an event might not say much to us, but it did to them. It would have said that Jesus was now enthroned in heaven as king. They would have come to this conclusion based on their knowledge of the Hebrew Scriptures.

The place that would have immediately come to mind was Daniel 7. Here, Daniel records a vision where he sees a human figure (the Son of Man) coming on the clouds of heaven and going up to God's throne room. Here he receives a hero's welcome and is seated as co-regent. Well, this is what those present that day would have understood happening when Jesus was taken up from them on the day of the Ascension (Acts 1:2-10).

This vision also meshes well with other insights and fore-gleams found in the Old Testament. For example, in Ezekiel 34 we find God soliloquising (talking to Himself out loud . . . a common literary device). As He looks around at the 'shepherds of Israel', the rulers of His people, He sees a pretty sorry lot. They have fed themselves and not the sheep, and He is not pleased.

In response, God dramatically declares that He Himself is coming to save His people and to be their ruler. Still later in the same chapter we discover that He will do this thing through a member of King David's family -- the Messiah.

Well, there you have it. Jesus' first followers would have seen Jesus 'going up' as a confirmation that He was in fact God's anointed – the Messiah – and that He was now the one in charge, the true King.

What might all this say to us in this year of grace and sorrow 2021? What about: Don't despair. Be of good cheer.

Things may appear to be out of control . . . there may be more problems than any human leader can sort out and put right. Nevertheless, there is One who can, and He has already taken on this task.

Our job in the present is to acknowledge Him as the lord and leader of our lives and to live joyfully, confidently and purposefully as citizens of the new world order. It is to announce to a world in freefall, there is hope! Are we doing this?

GRANT, we beseech thee, Almighty God, that like as we do believe thy only-begotten Son our Lord Jesus Christ to have ascended into the heavens; so we may also in heart and mind thither ascend, and with him continually dwell, who liveth and reigneth with thee and the Holy Ghost, one God, world without end. Amen.
(Collect for Ascension Day, Book of Common Prayer)

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