

Column

I have friends who are confirmed conspiracy theory believers. When I see them, my first question is, “What is going on in the conspiracy world?” Oftener than not, they are only too eager to tell me! Maybe you have friends like that.

The background to many of these theories is the belief there is a secretive power elite at work behind the scenes, a shadow government. These nefarious characters are bent on bringing down the present economic system, ending national sovereignty and establishing a new world order.

Is there any truth in such claims? Who knows? I 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, 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.

Now 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 God had given him. A human figure called the “Son of Man” comes, following his period of suffering down below, on the clouds of heaven to the Ancient of Days (God) and receives a throne. Well, this is what they would have understood happening when Jesus was visibly parted from them at 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, a common literary device). As He looks around at the ‘shepherds of Israel’, their rulers, 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, that He was already reigning in heaven (God’s space). As much is said in the Lord’s Prayer, “thy Kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.” The problem is not in God’s dimension, but in ours.

What might all this say to us as we near the end of 2024?

I think it might be this. We live in a world of uncertainty. Unrest continues in the Ukraine, in the Middle East and many other places around the world. At home, there seem to be more problems than any human leader, including a new President, can sort out and put right. Nevertheless, God remains at work. With the resurrection of Jesus, a new order began. Finally, the One who came, comes.

The task of Jesus' followers as they await His coming is to acknowledge Him as the lord and leader of their lives, to live joyfully, confidently and purposefully as citizens of the new order, to be lights and to pick up those who fall because of sin's deceptions and the false values of the world. Above all, it is to be agents of hope. Are you doing this? Am I?

ALMIGHTY God, give us grace that we may cast away the works of darkness, and put upon us the armour of light, now in the time of this mortal life, in which thy Son Jesus Christ came to visit us in great humility; that in the last day, when he shall come again in his glorious majesty to judge both the quick [living] and dead, we may rise to the life immortal, through him who liveth and reigneth with

thee and the Holy Ghost, now and ever. Amen.
(Collect for Advent, Book of Common Prayer)

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