

# Utopia

There are three utopian visions in the New Testament. Jesus preached the 'reign of God', a kind and fair society which is good news for the poor and hungry. He had come to announce its arrival, and he predicted that he would return 'coming in clouds with great power and glory' (Mark 13:26). to institute it in full. Furthermore, 'there are some of those standing here who will not taste death before before they see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom' (Matthew 16:28). He did not return in their lifetime and still has not returned two millennia later. But a kind and fair society is still a good idea, and if we have given up expecting him to return by now, then it is left up to us to bring it about.

Secondly, Paul 'the apostle to the Gentiles', preached a united new humanity 'in Christ', where everyone is counted of equal moral worth: 'In Christ there is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus' (Galatians 3:28). . No racism. No classism. No sexism. This idea of *el hombre nuevo* – the new human being and new humanity – was taken up by Che Guevara, who tried to put it into practice in Latin America. In his book *Inventing the Individual* Larry Siedentop points out what a revolutionary idea this new humanity 'in Christ' was:

Paul's conception of the Christ overturns the assumption on which ancient thinking had hitherto rested, the assumption of natural inequality. Instead Paul wagers on human equality...

Paul's vision on the road to Damascus amounted to the discovery of human freedom – of the moral agency potentially available to each and everyone, that is, to individuals...

The third utopian vision comes in the book of Revelation (21:3-4): the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down from heaven to Earth like a bride dressed for her wedding. The heavenly ideal is *realised* on Earth:

'See the home of God is among humans.  
He will dwell with them;  
they will be his people,  
and God himself will be with them;  
he will wipe away every tear from their eyes...  
Mourning and crying and pain will be no more.'

*Utopia* is the title of this *Sofia*. In the first article David Boulton writes about the persistent vision of Utopia, that quashed will rise again. His article

reviews *The Infinite City: Utopian Dreams on the Streets of London* by Niall Kishtainy. Every day when I walk through my little park in Camden Town I listen to the many languages being spoken, some I understand and some I don't. I see the different parents and children in the playground, playing and chatting together. Those utopian dreams of London are being partly realised here. They are prominent in Londoner William Blake's poem *Jerusalem*, two extracts from which are printed on page 15 .

Boulton begins by recalling the day in 1999 when he, the previous editor of SOF Network's magazine, and its present editor 'were among several hundred utopians marching to St George's Hill... We were commemorating the 350<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Gerrard Winstanley's attempt to dispossess the Hill's landlords and return the land to the people.'

Next, Francis McDonagh writes the sad story of a failed Utopia: Nicaragua. In the 1980's, following the Revolution that overthrew the dictator Somoza, the Sandinistas came to power in Nicaragua and did their best to promote 'a sane and kindly humanism that sees the liberation and flowering of humanity as the chief object of culture'. Liberation theology had a very fruitful input into the Sandinista project. Among other things, they redistributed the dictator's lands to the landless and set up poetry workshops all over the country.

Now Daniel Ortega has been re-elected and become a dictator himself. He has exiled many of his former comrades, including 'Comandante Dos', Dora María Téllez and the poet Gioconda Belli, now living in Spain, where she recently published a lament for Nicaragua in the Spanish newspaper *El País*. This *Sofia* includes a translation of her poem.

Greenness is a utopian ideal and John Pearson writes the first of what will be a regular column entitled *Going Green*. In his article 'Who is Human?' Dominic Kirkham writes about race and discrimination. There are the usual reviews, Penny Mawdsley's *Penn'orth* column and more.

The projected title for the next *Sofia* (March 2024) is *Water*. Contributions to this theme are cordially invited.