

# The Kingdom, the Power, the Glory ... and the Morning Star

‘The Kingdom of God’, the core of Jesus’ preaching, sounds strange to us today (indeed, one of my editorial predecessors, David Boulton, found the term so alienating that he changed it to the ‘republic of heaven’). So what does the ‘Kingdom of God’ mean? Can it still have any relevance for us? To whom does it belong? This issue of *Sofia* explores some of the richness and tensions in this central Christian myth.

Satan is called ‘the prince of this world’ and Jesus speaks of ‘my kingdom’. In the Bible both Satan and Christ are called the Morning Star (‘Lucifer’). In our first article Don Cupitt looks at the contrasts and curious parallels between them. Cupitt notes that themes of rebelling against the Power of the Father have accrued to Lucifer as Satan, whereas Jesus is ‘obedient unto death’. He mentions the quandary Milton found himself in when writing *Paradise Lost* ‘to justify the ways of God to man’, that, as a republican who had supported King Charles’ execution, he was ‘of the Devil’s party without knowing it’. Cupitt points to the ongoing connection of these ‘rebellious elements’ (manifested in the English Revolution of 1649) with the growth of struggles for democracy. ‘Lucifer’ is an entry in Cupitt’s theological dictionary *Turns of Phrase: Radical Theology from A-Z*, reprinted here with his permission; the book is reviewed in this *Sofia* by Ian Stubbs.

In my article ‘Whose is the Kingdom?’ I turn to some New Testament texts in which Jesus speaks about the Kingdom of God, which he has come to bring on Earth. It is a good society – a ‘utopia’ – where peace and justice reign. It belongs first to the poor, the humble, the ‘little ones’. Then I consider two historical ‘translations’ of this theme. First, its translation into the idea of God as a supreme ruler *backing* and *legitimising* the authority of an earthly ruler in Christendom. Second, I look at its possible translation into humanist, non-supernatural terms, with Jesus Christ as the mythical hero and figurehead of a transformed humanity in a kind society. This is a society we can only struggle to create ourselves, as it still has not (as Jesus expected) irrupted with supernatural power into this world.

The notion that the Kingdom belongs first to the poor and the little continues to be as scandalous as it was in Jesus’ time. Today we are still ruled by ‘thrones, dominations, principalities and powers’, such as the Market, Mammon, giant multi-national corporations, the 1%, even if we do elect our government. Throughout history the rich and powerful – emperors, kings

and popes – have claimed ‘the kingdom, the power and the glory’ in God’s name. In our next article ‘The Wisdom of Lord Acton’, David Lee discusses the case of papal infallibility. Acton was the one who coined the phrase: ‘All power tends to corrupt and absolute power corrupts absolutely.’ Moreover, he said, ‘Every act of infallible judgement is an exercise in absolute power’.

In his editorial introduction to the *Journal of Consciousness Studies* in 2005, ‘The Sense of Being Glared At’, Anthony Freeman speaks of the accusation of heresy being associated with a ‘paradigm shift’. As we know, Anthony Freeman, another distinguished former editor of this magazine, was accused of heresy and sacked from his job when he published *God in Us: The Case for Christian Humanism*. But he argues, and I would agree with him, that the ‘translation’ of the Christian story into non-supernatural, humanist terms, is much less startling than some previous ‘translations’ (he gives the example of Thomas Aquinas translating from neo-platonic into Aristotelian terms and being accused of heresy for it; my example, given above, was ‘Christendom’). In this issue of *Sofia* Dominic Kirkham also considers a ‘paradigm shift’ in the field of science, in his review of *The Science Delusion* by Rupert Sheldrake

On the final pages we recall a parallel to Christ as the Morning Star in another culture – Quetzalcóatl – the ancient Toltec mythical god-king, driven out of the city for forbidding human sacrifice. He went down into the sea and rose again as the Morning Star, promising to return and restore a just kingdom. As Ernesto Cardenal points out in his poem *Quetzalcóatl*, Venus, which shines as the Evening Star then disappears and returns some days later as the Morning Star, is an image of the descent into hell, the underworld, followed by resurrection. So we conclude this issue of *Sofia* with some lines from the *Exultet*, the great Praise Song to the Pascal Candle sung at the Easter vigil, which ends:

Let the Morning Star find its flame still burning.  
I mean that Morning Star which knows no setting,  
Christ your son,  
who came back from the underworld  
and shone serenely on the human race.

Lastly, please see the advertisement for the SOF Summer Conference *Work and Worth* on page 6. You should find some insert fliers with further information and a booking form. It looks as if it will be an interesting event and we hope you can come.