

# The Body of Christ

Christmas is coming, which celebrates the story of God (the divine) becoming embodied in a human being, so potentially in the whole of humanity as a single body all sharing fullness of life. In the words of Charles Wesley's carol: 'Light and life to all he brings'. Unfortunately, at the moment the British government completely denies that vision and preaches an anti-gospel. At the Queen's funeral, prime minister Liz Truss read from John's Gospel: 'I am the Way, the Truth and the Life' almost as if she was talking about herself and her dogmatic neo-liberal ideology promoting a gospel of Growth, Growth, Growth – offering tax cuts to the richest people and bad news for the poor.

In the Christmas story Jesus is born in a stable 'because there was no room for them in the inn'. 'Mild he lays his glory by' and descends to associate with the excluded and the lowest in society in order to raise them up: 'Born to raise the sons of Earth'. That is the opposite of planning to send asylum seekers to Rwanda. Liz Truss has gone now but her successor, though less rigid and more competent, still pursues this far-right agenda. Pray that after thousands of Christmases we may one day get a government that sees the light and supports a decent life for all.

## Avarice

George Herbert

Money thou bane of bliss, and source of woe,  
Whence cam'st thou, that thou art so fresh and fine?  
I know thy parentage is base and low;  
Man found thee poor and dirty in a mine  
Surely thou didst so little to contribute  
To this great kingdom, which thou now hast got,  
That he was fain, when thou wert destitute,  
To dig thee out of thy dark cave and grot;  
Then forcing thee by fire he made thee bright:  
Nay, thou hast got the face of man; for we  
Have with our stamp and seal transferred our right:  
Thou art the man, and man but dross to thee.  
Man calleth thee his wealth, who made thee rich;  
And while he digs out thee, falls in the ditch.

If we believe that God is a poetic tale personifying real cosmic forces and actual or potential human capabilities (such as love), then we will not take the story of God coming down to Earth literally but as a way of offering a vision of humanity's fulfilment. We will not read the saying 'I am the Way the Truth and the Life' to adopt Jesus as our 'personal saviour' paying a ransom for our individual sins. We can take it as it developed in the reflection of the early Christian community into the ideal of 'Christ Jesus' as the new humanity in one body, permeated with 'the divine', where everyone is of equal moral worth, black or white, high or low, male and female.

In this *Sofia* issue, Stephen Mitchell has the first article on *The Body of Christ*, in which he opposes the reductionism of limiting the richness of the Christian tradition to the actual words of Jesus; as he points out, these are sometimes difficult to establish anyway. Edwin Salter discusses *The Good Chap and the Divine Saviour*. In his article *There is no such Person as an Individual*, criticising Margaret Thatcher's famous dictum 'there is no such thing as society', Grenville Gilbert writes: 'There is no such person as an abstract individual, i.e. a totally separate human being who can live solely by the market. We all live together on planet Earth.'

As William Morris's heroine Ellen says at the end of his utopian novel *News from Nowhere*: 'Go on living while you may, striving, with whatsoever pain and labour needs must be, to build up little by little the new day of fellowship, and rest, and happiness.' To which, as he wakes up, Guest replies, : 'Yes, surely! and if others can see it as I have seen it, then it may be called a vision rather than a dream.'