

It's easy to be divisive; it's what human beings do; it's what we're good at – taking things apart, taking others apart whether individually or collectively, as peoples or nation-states. It's much harder to be one or, better, to realise our potential to be one, perhaps because only God is one, or rather we are only one in God - it's something to do with the nature of God, it's God's prerogative – so we cannot be one without God, without God's reign. There's a delightful story in a Lent book for next year by Teresa White entitled 'Hope and the Nearness of God'. She's visiting relatives in Milton Keynes on the Feast of Christ the King and collapses in giggles at the Sunday Mass in their parish church when she notices a misprint in the first hymn – instead of 'Our God reigns' it says 'Our God resigns'; fortunately, when the hymn is sung everyone goes into automatic and she hears 'Our God reigns' sung with its usual gusto. A Freudian slip perhaps in increasingly troubled times – revealing the very real anxiety we all have of disintegration.

I visited someone recently who was going through that process of disintegration, indeed to the point where he was deemed no longer safe at home and had been consigned to a nursing home in Northampton. He looked and sounded much like his old self when I saw him after several months in this home until he suddenly said

'I've been murdered but luckily they found me and now I'm all right'. What he'd been through, expressed in these symbolic terms – though entirely real to himself – was a death and resurrection. It would be too much to say the process of disintegration had ended but somewhere in that statement was a sign of hope and I think we can say the same about the readings we hear today in Daniel, Revelations and John. All language is symbolic and capable of many meanings – used in Daniel, for example, to protect its author from persecution and in John to reveal where Pilate is in his understanding of truth. Ambiguity then in the cause of truth

'one like a son of man' 'coming on the clouds of heaven'

'the first-born from the dead, the Ruler of the beings of the earth'

'Yes I am a king, I was born for this, I came into the world for this, to bear witness to the truth'.

And the truth, which worries Pilate, but largely escapes him, is that Jesus is the Lord God, who is, who was and who is to come: 'the Almighty' – the one who is the same yesterday, today and tomorrow. This is again a concept we have to express in highly ambivalent terms: in terms of the Trinity and so on, and in terms of the Incarnation: deeply symbolic of the place where this battle between integration and disintegration in all of us is finally settled, finally healed, though the forces of disintegration may still seem to hold sway in the reality of our daily lives. But it's because Christ is one with God, and is God, that we can have hope that whatever the chaos within us and around us, humanity is not in itself a bar to salvation, not in itself at odds with God after all. For in Christ we see reality as a seamless garment and God not as God of the dead but of the living for to God all people, all things are in fact alive. Our God reigns when we, not God, are resigned to this.

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