

THE KENARCHY JOURNAL VOL 2

Editorial

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An inveterate dreamer shared a new scenario with me, overtaken by an immense sense of disorientation. She dreamt she had left her car in the normal car park to go shopping, but she couldn't find it on her return. It's a fairly common dream many of us might recognise from our own nocturnal processing in times of transition. What shocked this dreamer however was not the loss of her car or the familiar car park, but the completely new, totally unrecognisable layout of the roads she found herself walking in. They were roads and by-ways that held some vague recollection of something she might once have known but which, as she searched, panicked, re-traced her steps and looked again, she realised had been completely and irretrievably reconfigured in the few moments that she had been gone. Losing the car was nothing in comparison with the loss of her bearings, her direction, indeed, her very belonging to a familiar shape, place, time or way of being.

This disconcerting loss of certainty is an increasingly real collective experience as we all struggle through the grief, anger, bargaining and depressive stages of the world - as we have known it - changing around us. From this latest global shock, a vicious pandemic that invades every facet of 'normal' life, our economies, relationships, families, and our very bodies, climaxing as it does the other growing, shocking realisations of ever-encroaching climate, justice, social and cultural existential threats, no road map will function where the landscape itself has, hopefully forever, changed. Three recent books by radically insightful women help us to frame this volume of the Kenarchy Journal in the face of these immense challenges. Margaret Wheatley's¹ neat synopsis (referencing Glubb) of the decline of civilisations gives us a helpful steer towards a sufficiently convincing awakening to settle the necessity of a *katargēsis*² of the present era. This might then, potentially, offer the beginning of hope if we 'map it' onto Catherine Keller's

¹ Margaret Wheatley, *Who do we Choose to Be?* (Oakland, CA: Berrett-Koehler Publishers Inc., 2017), 34-36.

² See Giorgio Agamben, *The Time that Remains* (Oakland, CA: Stanford University Press, 2005), 98, for his excellent exegesis of St Paul's use of the word in Romans. At its etymological root, it refers to "that which is de-activated, taken out of *energeia* ('active operation')". It implies the potentiality for something new emerging as that which is outmoded is "rendered inoperative".

extraordinary exposure of “amorous agonism”³ as a way to hold the dark moment before the dawn of emergence. She suggests a vibrant, though deliberately ill-defined, love-motivated embrace of this ‘not-knowing’ (certainly love does not insist on being right) to counter the bitter and sterile ant/agonism of positional, (fake) truth statements and behaviours. And Valarie Kaur⁴ narrates practical activist examples of how we might love “in a time of turmoil.”

They share a passionate call for an intersectional approach. Kaur embodies this particularly as “Sikh women in America must fight on at least three different fronts: hate and racism out in the world, ignorance and invisibility even within progressive spaces, and sexism within our own community.... We are stronger together.”⁵ Keller appeals to the *kairos* time that we live and asks, “How shall we ‘broaden our ethos of interconnectedness’ at this time when time itself is contracting on us?”⁶ We might, in the face of the entangled differences of earth crisis, ask instead: How can we not?”⁷ All three sound a call for self and community reflection and responsibly creative leadership, which will be both necessary to survive and necessarily demanding.

Keller is the only theologian of the three, digging to the deeper ontological issues with which we are also concerned. She goes on to trace the effects of a closed, doctrinally determined theology which has both legitimated and benefitted from a Western exceptionalism. Looking to the margins of “a failing theological mainstream” she writes, “As the purveyor of the most developed theistic alternative to the controlling deity, the movement of process theology has long fomented local and planetary resistance to the oppressive secularizations, imperial, neoliberal, or dictatorial, of sovereign omnipotence”⁸.

Kenarchy finds itself happily aligned with this resistance. In seeking, along with many others, “alternatives to the lordly omnipotence (which) were repressed all along by the politics of His spokesmen (*sic*),” we have likewise discovered that “a certain alignment of orthodoxy and power impeded the wide cultivation of amorous alternatives to the Lord of power and might,”⁹ one which Mitchell has significantly excavated.¹⁰ So now tracking further with the incarnated disclosure of the vicariously human Jesus, we

³ Catherine Keller, *Political Theology of the Earth* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2018).

⁴ Valarie Kaur, *See No Stranger. A Memoir and Manifesto of Revolutionary Love*. (London: Aster, 2020).

⁵ Kaur, 96.

⁶ Keller draws on Agamben’s exposure of Messianic (*kairos*) time ‘contracting’ also in “The Time that Remains”.

⁷ Keller, 38.

⁸ Keller, 142

⁹ Keller, 136.

¹⁰ Roger Haydon Mitchell, *Church, Gospel and Empire: How the Politics of Empire Impregnated the West* (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf & Stock, 2011).

are drawn to the call, or “lure” as Keller would have it, of these “attractive alternatives”¹¹ among the excepted, where Jesus seemed to look for his own understanding of them and which he pointed out for his disciples to consider.

So in this volume we follow up on our introduction to kenarchy and examine some more of the different foci of Jesus’ own teaching ‘from the margins’. We ask, if the first divinely human communication is the giggle and gurgle of a baby and he later put a “child in the midst”, what might we discover from an enquiry into Jesus’ own interactions with children? The Child Theology Movement daringly suggests a theology which argues *from* “the child in the midst” *to* a revelation of the divine; and Mitchell finds “the realisation that the place of the greatest vulnerability is the location of the divine presence cascades a re-ordering of our personal priorities.”¹² Jesus’ teaching to listen to and include the ‘stranger’ is amplified by the divine discrimination to be embodied as a Nazarene (“Can anything good come from Nazareth?”¹³), from Galilee “of the Gentiles”¹⁴, and we see the Trinity’s own expression in the face of the refugee. Hilary Hopwood’s experience of women’s inter-cultural solidarity fleshes out further Sunita Abraham’s insights from her own experience and research, that an “understanding of participation and equality of difference coupled with dialectic self-reflection is important for cultivating progressive politics and developing the idea of reparative love.”¹⁵ Thirdly, Jesus’ emphasis on those marginalised by the law, incarcerated and imprisoned is also highlighted, and again, his identification is with them. The voice of the prisoner is heard in Northey’s provoking article: “Isn’t it odd that Christendom ... claims to pray to and adore a being who was a prisoner of Roman power, an inmate of the empire’s death row?”¹⁶ The application and development of the role of law, perhaps itself a facet of state exceptionalism, may fail to hear “the ‘dissenting voice’ hidden in the Law, the voice of the voiceless victim,”¹⁷ which Lapish points out, and which Jesus gave his own silent presence to fulfil. Without the “narratological dissenting voice”¹⁸

¹¹ Keller, 175.

¹² Roger Haydon Mitchell, “Towards a Theology of Childhood”, in *The Kenarchy Journal Vol 2* (www.Kenarchy.org, March 2021), 121.

¹³ John 1:46.

¹⁴ Matthew 4:15; Isaiah 9:1-2.

¹⁵ Sunita Abraham, “Reparative Love” in *The Kenarchy Journal Vol 2* (www.Kenarchy.org, March 2021), 51.

¹⁶ Wayne Northey, “Restorative Justice: Peacemaking *Not* Warmaking; Transformative Justice: Penal Abolitionism *Not* Prison Reform” in *The Kenarchy Journal Vol 2* (www.Kenarchy.org, March 2021), 89.

¹⁷ Marisa Lapish, “Casting Stones at Laws Cast in Stone: A Christotelic Narrative of Biblical Law Revealed Through a Story of Trauma: John 8:1-11” in *The Kenarchy Journal Vol 2* (www.Kenarchy.org, March 2021), 110.

¹⁸ Lapish, 106.

being heard, we find ourselves subjecting many to an iniquitous incarceration which must seriously challenge our imperial concepts of 'safety'. We need to visit prisoners.

And that dissenting voice springs from an "overarching narrative"¹⁹ that reveals and sustains the purpose of acts and/or choices. Keller's very veiled suggestion is that a new narrative may be (beginning?) to emerge (you see how veiled?) where loving un-knowing potentially images God most accurately, as they themselves practice *becoming* in relational interconnectedness with us equally free beings-who-become. It's a narrative which gladly dissents from sovereign exceptionalism and individualistic self-determination. Instead, truly loving freedom to become ever broader and greater expressions of loving sociality springs from the Deep of our Creator's own choice and act. It is this overarching narrative which sources Marshall's persuasive application of "Paul's ministry of reconciliation"²⁰ to social and restorative justice, and adds the activist impulse to Thomas Oord's imagining of a truly loving civilization. And it breathes through Brad Jersak's heady collapse of existence (the choices and actions we make as our Way) and essence (the ontological world-view, as our Truth) into the wholeness of human (and more than human) Life, and so to deeper, understanding action.

So, as we echo the negative theology of exposing what God is *not*: that of "the deity of sovereign omnipotence ... exposed in His injustice"²¹, and continue to listen to the alternative stories, we lean into a rekindled imagination of how the power of love, rather than the love of power²² might be conceived and lived out. With Keller we recognise that "theos logos" (theology) "seeks enfleshment in the common world, as the most common good, reverberating through the variegated skins of the undercommons,"²³ in the commonality of the colourful diversity, the humbling intersectionality, all at the margins of a dominant ideology. But the further deeper challenge of Valarie Kaur is that "our story of exceptionalism doesn't allow us to confront our past with open eyes. A nation that cannot see its own past cannot see the suffering it has caused; suffering that persists into the present. A nation that cannot see our suffering, cannot grieve with us. A nation that cannot grieve with us cannot know us, and therefore cannot love

¹⁹ Lapish, 106.

²⁰ 2 Corinthians 5: 16-21.

²¹ Keller, 172.

²² Ghandi or Jimi Hendrix? The arguments are manifold!

²³ Keller, 170.

us.”²⁴ So the storied activism and agonistic enquiry of these articles must challenge us to ever more reflective, shared, emotional, spiritual and embodied change.

²⁴ Kaur, 57.