

# The Kenarchy Journal Volume 3

## Starting points: Health and Wellbeing

### Editorial

Sue Mitchell

The mental constructs of western thought are the subject of much interrogation in this third volume of the Kenarchy journal, with this, its third (and last) 'introductory' editorial. These introductory volumes have aimed to clarify initially seven discrete priorities for a kenarchy-shaped practical activism, although we are aware that exclusionary, hierarchical power is actually experienced intersectionally at the margins of society. Seeking nonetheless, pragmatically, to expose these distinctively embodied foci as descriptive of a kenarchic, and therefore counter-political, gospel, we come to spotlight the remaining focus to "heal the sick"<sup>1</sup>. Perhaps not surprisingly, we discover that it is immediately contextualized in its truly intersectional interaction.

In the Luke 10 reference, the *therapeutic* intervention that is Jesus' healing instruction ('*therapeuō*,' to serve or cure) engages with all of the following: the receptivity of households and cities ("If they receive you"), the dust of the earth (which ongoingly witnesses), the cultures, histories and belief systems (the listed names, Chorazin, Bethsaida, Tyre, Sidon and Capernaum surely speak of extant memories), and even the heavens and Hades are implicated as "the kingdom of heaven has come near." So we clearly find ourselves facing a systemic sickness of mind, body, sociality and ecology, into which context the instruction to "heal the sick" explodes as a super focal point, a target for an ontological shift from an expectation of captivity and severe dystopia to *being well*.

Noel Moules traces a clear connection between the shalom (wellbeing or wholeness) of the Hebrew Scriptures and the declaration of peace (*eirēnē*) with which Jesus frames the healing journey.<sup>2</sup> This invokes the all-encompassing integration of "physical and material well-being and dignity for all things; justice in every relationship; (and) spiritual integrity and uprightness within each individual."<sup>3</sup> It offers a route to human flourishing, of being well, individually and together in communities, and in creation. But, given the context of collective, broken (bitter and often

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<sup>1</sup> Luke 10: 9 has the precise instruction, but the context is of the whole chapter, and Jesus' own embodied practice.

<sup>2</sup> Noel Moules, *Fingerprints of Fire ... Footprints of Peace* (Alresford, UK: Circle Books, 2011).

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 30.

traumatic) memories and, within that, a call both for agentic receptivity in the community and the need for the carriers of this ontological shift to be themselves committed to a radical vulnerability in an unforgiving political arena (“as lambs in the midst of wolves”, carrying no financial or insurance backup), how might we expect this alternative world, this kingdom of healing love to be instantiated in our day?

Our contributors, as activists as well as academics, come passionately to this subject. In the light of our own collective memories, here are cries for the need of a fresh imagination, firstly, as Paul Millbank laments,<sup>4</sup> free from the rationalising mind-control of the modern era, which is indeed a daunting task for theology. In shaping this editorial I have drawn on the prescient work of lead editor Roger Haydon Mitchell’s doctoral supervisor, Paul Fletcher. The latter’s death in 2008 was *untimely*, and meant that his seminal work was published posthumously. (His comment on time and eternity, that while “time itself is marked by the moment of destruction ... destruction in no way denotes an experience that is ... diminishing. Its force is transformative!”<sup>5</sup> is the more poignant, and comforting.) His book has an explanatory foreword from fellow academics Michael Dillon and Arthur Bradley. They summarise Paul’s thought that, during modernity, “on the one hand, theology abandons the study of nature, the world and truth to science. On the other, theology retreats to the interior, privatised faith of the liberal, autonomous individual. In this sense *Christianity re-makes itself entirely* in the image of a secular, liberal modernity that remains fundamentally alien to its history, doctrine and cosmology”<sup>6</sup> (my emphasis). In her article, which follows Milbank’s, Julie Tomlin broadens our understanding of how the patriarchal, colonising history of exclusion and extraction preceded and infiltrated an even longer journey than modernity, even to the present day. Now we can see “fresh evidence daily that the systems built on individualism, nationalism and the expectation of limitless resources are showing signs of stress: empty shelves, sharp rises in fuel prices, energy companies going bust, disrupted global supply chains, and a fragility in relation to the adverse weather conditions that seem ever-more frequent.”<sup>7</sup>

Yet we potentially still struggle with the hangover of working within the damaged theological framework that Dillon and Bradley have outlined above, to do the work of imagining a different one. Emerging (kicking and screaming?) from the modern era, we find ourselves stretched between two effects it had on Christian theology. Firstly that, having been expelled “to the margins

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<sup>4</sup> Paul Millbank, “A Society without Imagination: A Lament.” In this volume of *The Kenarchy Journal*.

<sup>5</sup> Paul Fletcher, *Disciplining the Divine: Toward an (Im)political Theology* (Farnham, UK: Ashgate, 2009), 161.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid*, Michael Dillon and Arthur Bradley, “Foreword,” viii.

<sup>7</sup> Julie Tomlin, “Hidden in Plain Sight: Reconsidering the Value of Social Reproduction and Nature.” In this current volume of *The Kenarchy Journal*.

of the *polis*”, it now “subjects all worldly or temporal power to a divine judgement delivered at the end of time,” and we look primarily to an apocalyptic, eschatological intervention of a (usually bloody) violent justice! Alternatively, we are mentally programmed to a “sacralisation of the secular (where) specific manifestations of temporal power acquire divine sanction as the *telos* of historical process,”<sup>8</sup> and an exclusive exceptionalism, or nationalistic “manifest destiny,” become the filter for a transcendent ‘hope.’

A consideration of these two alternatives is happily available in Mitchell’s article<sup>9</sup> (with two generous and thoughtful addenda from reviewers), since a fresh imagination and kenarchic conviction urge that “this is the time of the end” (though not necessarily the end of time) “in which we all now live ... and that even in its utter immanence this life remains essentially religious.”<sup>10</sup> Indeed, as the screaming fades with modernity an increasingly distant memory, how might we expect to see the kingdom of God interface with the immanence of an increasingly spiritual, pluriverse post-secularity? If the saeculum is the time *between* the incarnation and the end of time (apocalypse), Mitchell encourages us to look for ‘messianic’ experience as, drawing on Balthasar and Fletcher, a “scission that Jesus Christ has introduced into the world.”<sup>11</sup> Fletcher notes that the “transformative quality of the instant finds its specific and efficacious character at the point of convergence of immediacy and ultimacy.”<sup>12</sup> Though much of our experience and therefore expectation of time is subjective, again rooted in modern thinking, Fletcher draws attention to the “traces of a temporality that is resolutely-other-than-historical-time”, and, quoting Karl Barth, that ““between the past and the future – between the times – there is a “Moment” – the *Now* – when the past and the future stand still, when the former ceases its going and the latter its coming.’ That is to say ... when history is overwhelmed by the irruption of another time, the Moment.”<sup>13</sup> Prescient of a post-modern culture where increasingly, therapeutic and psychodynamic approaches are retraining us to ‘be in the moment’, it also points to where our hope and faith might draw on the at-hand-ness of the ‘*kairos*’<sup>14</sup> experience of the kingdom of God to overwhelm a presently failing politics.

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<sup>8</sup> Dillon and Bradley, in Fletcher, ix.

<sup>9</sup> Roger Haydon Mitchell, “Towards a Political Theology of Nations” in this volume of *The Kenarchy Journal*.

<sup>10</sup> Dillon and Bradley, in Fletcher, ix.

<sup>11</sup> Roger Haydon Mitchell, *Church, Gospel and Empire: How the Politics of Sovereignty impregnated the West* (Eugene: Oregon, Wipf & Stock, 2011) 201.

<sup>12</sup> Fletcher, 160.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 161.

<sup>14</sup> Cf. Giorgio Agamben, *The Time that Remains* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005). Agamben probes the relationship of ‘*kairos*’ (operational) time, with *chronos*, our present ‘chronological’ representation of time. “‘*Kairos*’ and ‘*chronos*’ are usually opposed to each other, as though they were heterogeneous, which is more or less the case. But what is most important in our case is ... the relation between them. What do we have when we have *Kairos*? Look at the extraordinary interlacing of these two concepts, they are literally

If so, where would *kairos* time meet with creational spaciality? The locus of a healthy society has city life as the only viable space for a plurality of voices to find fresh energy and justice, both from and with, the marginalised ('backgrounded' or even made entirely invisible) 'other' in the hope of a "New Jerusalem". Nigerian academic Nimi Wariboko describes "the global city as a site of intense human encounter with God and a metaphor for the new things God is doing in history,"<sup>15</sup> and in this further stimulates a fresh imaginary of how trans-immanence might be configured. As the ultimate site of intersectional experiences, the city offers "the taking place of a new world horizon characterised by the whole world of humanity" where the sovereignty of statehood cannot control the flows. He continues, "We are in the midst of flows of energies: religious/spiritual, fundamentalism and fanaticism, sexual (approved and contested), political (Arab-spring type activities), terrorism, and so on. How are we to enjoy (resist) them? These energies are not emanating from one source, cannot be controlled by one source, and do not have a single telos; hence all talk about globality is mute. What ought Pentecostal social ethics to do?"<sup>16</sup>

Mike Love's article argues eloquently, following on from Mitchell's article, about the role, hope and challenge of the complexity of city space and people, asserting that "the ekklesia ... has come into the world decisively for the world as a principle and a horizon, a struggle, process, and calling and a hermeneutical space from which all our current forms of politics can be adjudged."<sup>17</sup> This is thrilling, embodied and hopeful sight, to which activist, health executive and general medical practitioner Dr Andrew Knox's contribution adds deeply practical experience both of individual and social wellbeing in a city context, along with some heart-rending descriptions of what unmakes it.

Two other articles of gentle grace and challenge complete this volume. Marisa Lapish describes the practical, hospitable and equitable "table manners" of our mundane lives which potentially generate a sweet messianic in-breaking of the kingdom of God in our own time and space. And, describing the mediation of Zipporah in the extraordinary encounter of Exodus, when God appears to take Moses' life (or that of his son Gershom), Michael Huffman leads us to a

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placed within each other. *Kairos* (which would be translated banally as "occasion") does not have another time at its disposal; in other words, what we take hold of when we seize *kairos*, is not another time, but a contracted and abridged *chronos*." He, Fletcher and Mitchell all develop this thought and its implications for a 'Messianic instant'. I am challenged with the possibility of *seizing* the kairological experience of the kingdom in the now *chronos*.

<sup>15</sup> Nimi Wariboko, *The Charismatic City and the Public Resurgence of Religion* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), xii.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 53.

<sup>17</sup> Mike Love, "Healthy Cities." In this volume of *The Kenarchy Journal*.

beautiful consideration of Zipporah herself re-presenting God in *her* image. It seemed to me a marvelous, in-the-moment, embodied *violent* inception of the kingdom of God.<sup>18</sup>

In the present context of the pandemic sign, a challenge of such great global inequality, where “if we’re not all safe, no-one is safe”, nation statehood and its leadership is perhaps more clearly judged and found wanting than often before, and the potential flow of life into new city-based alternative social configurations gives pause for hopeful change. The vicious trajectory of power, control and domination over the ‘inferior’ other is perhaps gradually but incrementally being disempowered through feminist and ecological perspectives, alongside a theological renunciation of the church-state marriage which continued to legitimate such unjust hierarchy and exceptionalism for so long. As Mike Love quotes from Johan Galtung’s thought, “These structures remain that way until we tilt them the other way.”<sup>19</sup>

With this in view, the next editions of this journal will continue to excavate the implications of an incarnational gospel centred around the politics of love, the counter-political genius of Jesus, and we hope that the tilt towards kind justice and care breaking into today’s time and space will be the more weighted by it. The happy news is that we will now be partnering in this project with our friends Andrew Klager and Bradley Jersak at the Institute for Religion Peace and Justice <https://www.irpj.org/>, and Volume Four, planned for later this year will be published in partnership with them.

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<sup>18</sup> Matt 11: 12.

<sup>19</sup> Video of Johan Galtung: <https://www.futurelearn.com/info/courses/medical-peace-work/0/steps/27092>