

## Editorial

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In these complex times, when we find ourselves, suddenly and unpreparedly fully immersed in an apocalyptic, socio-geo-political epochal change, I am grateful for the thoughtful wisdom of feminist, process theologian, Catherine Keller who writes, “The metaphor of apocalypse ... has been playing itself out for a couple of millennia. It has affected religious as well as political, reactionary as well as revolutionary movements. It presents overtly and covertly. It refracts in a hallucinatory multiplicity of modes ...”<sup>1</sup> And it is the purpose and gift of this ‘refraction’ that we welcome in this journal’s present edition, as, in a moment of such challenge, we must surely look yet further beyond our ‘normative’ (certain?) ways of thinking. To the flow of fresher perspectives such as feminist and post-colonial theology, we call to a yet deeper curiosity, in the need to think/imagine always more inclusively. We hope this volume gives some pointers as to how to hold ourselves – and one another – in such an apocalyptic moment, as “the feedback loop between archaic prophecy and future history swirls through the present.”<sup>2</sup> May it perhaps, this time, be a present in which the marvellous availability of wide-ranging different psychological, cultural and theological wisdom is ours to consider, possibly to help us beyond the re-cycling of “same old, same old” certainties.

The challenges of a disruptive disclosure of changing times are many, among which is the impact on our understanding of beginnings and endings. While Italian philosopher Giorgio Agamben strengthens our confidence that the ongoing substance of God’s first creating word, the ‘arkhē,’ “is not only situated in a chronological past; it is contemporary with historical becoming and does not cease to operate within it”,<sup>3</sup> it is unclear how it flows into a potential telos or eschaton, which “if (it) cannot be read bluntly as The End, it is because it discloses the dynamic *edge*. On the edge – of time, of world – there is unveiled an indiscernibility between what is ending and what is trying to begin.”<sup>4</sup> How do we navigate such demands? We activists might attempt, with Keller, to be mindfully engaged in the process, pressing in to “disclose a space where ... last chances, remain nevertheless last chances,” where nothing is pre-determined. Or, with Gregory of Nissa, whose eschatology Jeff Mears exposes so helpfully in this volume, the more contemplative may find confidence in a journey

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<sup>1</sup> Catherine Keller *Facing Apocalypse* (Orbis Books, 2021), xiii

<sup>2</sup> Ibid, xii

<sup>3</sup> Giorgio Agamben *Nudities* (Stanford University Press, 2011), 17

<sup>4</sup> Keller *Facing Apocalypse*, 171

“deeper into the roots of orthodox Christianity to find a cohesive vision of a good God, with a good plan, and an ultimately good outcome for all.”<sup>5</sup>

Buried within these “indiscernibilities” are also questions of individual agency and collective consciousness of our world, our beliefs and our behaviours. There is cultural programming, in the face of which a multiplicity of newly discovered thought-processes, exposing their earlier exclusion, are challenging our ‘truth’ at very deep levels. These are the moments when we discover that our ‘mythic’ origins, or as Carl Jung would have it, our usually unknowable “collective unconscious,” forces its way into our consciousness to be reassessed. Sharon Blackie, psychologist and ‘mythologist’ suggests, “when civilisations start to become moribund; when social, economic and political systems stagnate, and empires become degenerate and unresponsive to the needs of the people, in walks Trickster to shake it all up!”<sup>6</sup> (A Trickster breaks up our natural vision, as in noticing the Shakespearian ‘fool’ rather than the powerful ‘king’.) Such ‘refraction’ changes our ‘reflection’ of what we thought normative, and issues in an ontological and, as such, a theological challenge.

We gratefully include in this volume therefore some sensitive but essential questioning of our cultural positioning from Paul Lancaster’s enquiry into Inter-cultural theology, and Johan Francis’s thoughtful research into contextual theology. He quotes, for example, Dr. Chung Hyun Kyung. “Why is it okay for you to interpret Christian theology from Neo-Platonic and Aristotelian philosophical view and make it orthodox theology and if I interpret gospel from Taoist, Buddhist, Confucian, shamanist philosophy, why it become syncretistic and heretical?” Faith Edwards looks similarly at the hermeneutical misuse of sacred texts to pre-determined political ends, while Lenée Fuelling draws on Giradian wisdom on the scapegoat motif. Together they bring a needed provocation to “all that is dysfunctional, hypocritical in us or in the culture, and above all, challenges our deepest assumptions about our own nature, or the nature of the world around us.”<sup>7</sup> So we also track the lived experience of such developing understanding in Roger Mitchell’s narrative of prayer, spiritual warfare teaching and kenotic alignment, as he evaluates his own inner-self changing alongside theological consideration.

Spencer Thompson’s long-read article takes the broadest possible view of some of the challenges to our deep collective expectations, among which is a received “imperial” sense that order, law and governance must control the chaotic. He makes the persuasive case that, “meaning is found in harmony which must contain both order and chaos. Either extreme results in discord. ...

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<sup>5</sup> Jeff Mears, this volume

<sup>6</sup> Sharon Blackie *Trickster Times* (Substack), January 25<sup>th</sup> 2025

<sup>7</sup> Blackie *Trickster Times*

They represent qualitatively different forces that can relate to each other in any number of ways – and it is this relationship that is operative.” In our context, it may be that the present chaotic disruption of the present world – “order” is an apocalypse/revelation of a “corrective chaos” necessary for us to re-discover and “to embrace the divine elemental chaos” of wilderness-journeying. (For further insight on this I strongly recommend also a re-reading of Julie Tomlin in previous editions of this journal<sup>8</sup>.) In such a dynamic, potential-filled moment, coming out of an empire-dominated mind-set into the unlearning of what we might have believed as eternally fixed truth, we might rediscover the demanding but deeply spiritual, agentic struggle against harsh control and slavish acceptance; and struggle into the ‘chaordic’ dance of a harmonising love, where our contributors are pointing us. To give a final word to Keller, “The struggle brings down to earth the Spirit that is already here: ... The issue is what we do, how we live, together. And somehow, sometimes, the Spirit dwells divinely in our togetherness – making it possible.”<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Julie Tomlin, “The Spiralling Dance of Wisdom” *The Kenarchy Journal* 1:3 and “Into the Wilderness” 5:2

<sup>9</sup> Keller, *Facing Apocalypse*, 196