

## Editorial - Kenarchy and Power

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The word kenarchy has been constructed to signify the way that divine power as witnessed by the gospel testimony to the incarnation consists in emptying out (*keno*) primacy and rule (*arche*) in the service of others. It follows that to exert power over another is always wrong. God does not use power in this way and nor should we. Jesus' statement "I am among you as one who serves,"<sup>1</sup> intimates that when love requires us to serve vulnerable others with direction or guidance, then we must find ways of doing this among or alongside them, not over them. In recent months this has been impressed on me more clearly than ever through what for me have been two fresh disclosures. The first is found in the Philippian hymn where the word *keno* appears and from which the related words *kenosis* and *kenarchy* have been formed, as readers of this journal are well aware. The second is in the call of Abraham out from Ur of the Chaldees, one of the most important imperial commercial hubs in the ancient world with which the global economic system continues to resonate. In the first, it is the simple implication of the order of words that dawned on me. "Though he was in the form of God, he did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men."<sup>2</sup> The emptying and taking the form of a servant follows on from being in the form of God and comes before being born as a human. The unmistakable implication is that this emptying out of primacy and rule in the service of others is already the character of deity before the act of incarnation.

In the second instance, what stood out it is the core meaning of the word 'bless' attributed to God in the call to Abraham to leave Ur. "I will bless those who bless you, ... and by you all the families of the earth shall bless themselves."<sup>3</sup> The Hebrew word for bless has at its root '*barak*' which means to kneel before or to bend the knee. So quite literally, God is declaring "I will kneel before those you kneel before and by you all the families of the earth will kneel before each other," a motivation quite opposite to the hierarchical domination that is characteristic of the world's empire systems throughout history until today. So *kenosis* is right there in the originary Old Testament narrative! What particularly moved me is how this bears out the *kenarchy* distinctive with regard to the final stanza of the Philippian hymn, which is that the exaltation of Jesus in the context is not a return to sovereign hierarchy after a limited *kenosis* but rather is the upending of the power

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<sup>1</sup> Luke 22: 27.

<sup>2</sup> Philippians 2: 6-7.

<sup>3</sup> Genesis 12: 3.

systems of the earth. “At the name of Jesus every knee will bow,”<sup>4</sup> because he is kneeling before them already. We will all empty our power out to serve one another!

Yet clear as all this may seem to be, Paul famously states in his first letter to the Corinthians “Love does not insist on its own way.”<sup>5</sup> So we cannot simply assert kenarchy and demand of each other that we live this way. To be truly loving, we must tease it out together, with our arms open to each other, working at this dough to make the bread of shared love. And this, I like to think, is what this eighth volume of our journal is all about. In the articles that follow we explore the metaphor of the sword in Jesus’ words “I come not to bring peace but a sword,”<sup>6</sup> and conclude that the cutting edge of Jesus’ nonviolent sword of love suffers with the suffering, giving a voice to the voiceless without engaging in harmful retaliation. We then tread a middle path between open theism and process theism to reconsider whether our understanding of divine omnipotence and creation *ex nihilo* might yet be understood in a way that affirms God’s essential love. We suggest ways that Christian *agape* and Hindu *anasakti yoga* let go of power, control and desire to make room for open-ended, sustainable, mutually healing peace and justice. We employ Joseph Nye’s terms of hard and soft power to find a more nuanced way of describing God’s power that avoids pitfalls which might be encountered in the deterministic camp of reformed theology on the one hand and open theism on the other. We consider whether the incarnation brought about an irreversible change to the previously hidden scapegoating that enabled peace through redemptive violence and whether there remains now only the apocalyptic choice between self-destruction and the kenotic imitation of Christ. We earth Jesus’ kenotic love very practically in the story of the woman caught in adultery and finally ground our considerations still further by examining how the current Nigerian Generation Z might transform the hugely challenging and entrenched political state of affairs there.

The book review section sign-posts us towards further power implications of the loving kenarchy of God through the titles ‘Reckoning with Power,’ ‘Jesus and the Powers,’ ‘A Revolutionary Jesus: Violence and Peacemaking in the kingdom of God’ and ‘A Jesus Way Forward.’ Our final book review explores a recently published PhD, seeking to expose and learn from the costly pursuit of Evangelical and African Pentecostal unity in Britain from the author’s first-hand experience around the millennium.

It is once again our privilege to publish the freely offered hard work of fellow researchers and activists for the common good of the social body, for whom we say a heartfelt thank you. It is

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<sup>4</sup> Philippians 2: 10.

<sup>5</sup> 1 Corinthians 13: 5.

<sup>6</sup> Matthew 10: 34.

our hope as editors of this journal that you will draw sustenance and resource from us all in your work. Please be encouraged and don't hesitate to submit your own offerings in this common calling going forward!