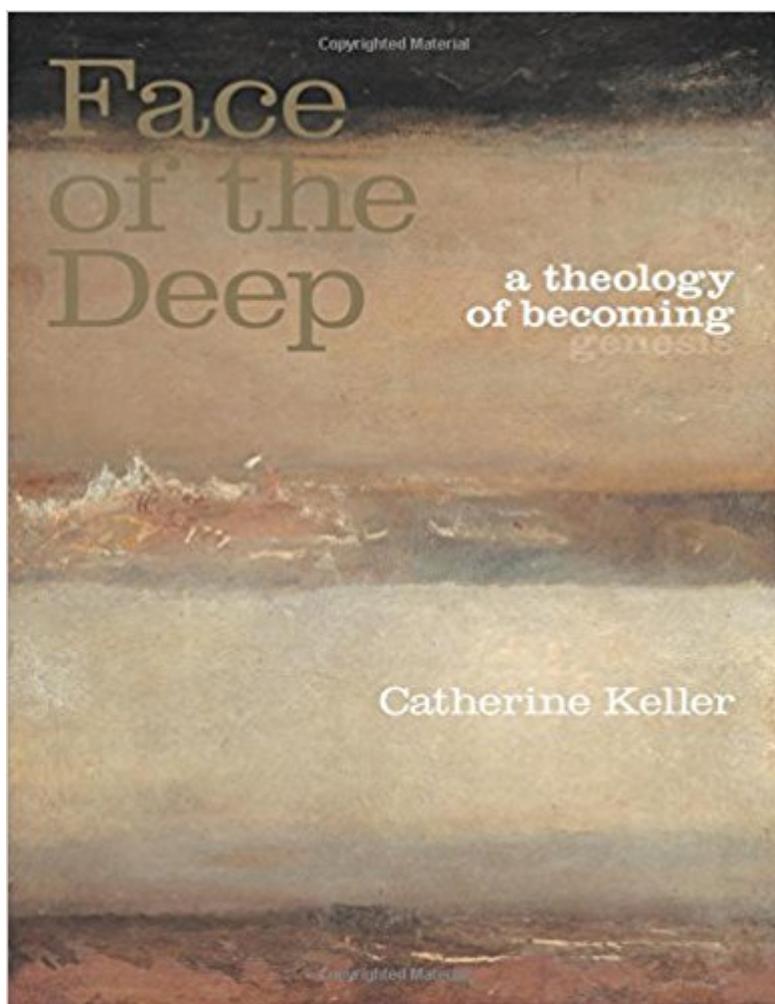


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# The Face Of The Deep: A Theology Of Becoming



## **Synopsis**

This is a groundbreaking, highly original work of postmodern feminist theology from one of the most important authors in the field. The Face of the Deep deconstructs the Christian doctrine of creation which claims that a transcendent Lord unilaterally created the universe out of nothing. Catherine Keller's impassioned, graceful meditation develops an alternative representation of the cosmic creative process, drawing upon Hebrew myths of creation, from chaos, and engaging with the political and the mystical, the literary and the scientific, the sexual and the racial. As a landmark work of immense significance for Jewish and Christian theology, gender studies, literature, philosophy and ecology, The Face of the Deep takes our originary story to a new horizon, rewriting the starting point for Western spiritual discourse.

## **Book Information**

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## **Customer Reviews**

'Keller offers a challenging contribution to a wide range of contemporary thinkers and concerns ... this book succeeds in articulating a spirited return for the becoming of theology.' - Reviews in Religion and Theology 'Face of the deep is a tour de force. Written in her own inimitable style ... Keller's profound meditations lure the reader toward a creative transformation of self and society.' - Review of Biblical Literature Newsletter

Catherine Keller is Professor of Constructive Theology at Drew University and Executive Director of the Drew Transdisciplinary Theological Colloquim. She is the author of numerous works in philosophical theology, including *From a Broken Web*, *Apocalypse Now and Then*; and co-editor of

Process and Difference.

Received as promised. Currently reading and reviewing.

I love the book!

One of the best theology books I've ever read. Seriously, I underlined something on every page.

Great read and provides new ideas on creation origins.

Thank you for your timely responses and a very compelling book.

I want to concur with the previous reviewers: reading this book is to experience an avalanche of awe! Each page is teeming with so many stunning and wonder-inducing insights that one has to remind oneself to breath. Keller has here unshackled theology from the sterile mis-reading of the second verse of the first chapter of Genesis: one that has blinded generations upon generations to the maternal dimension of the creation dance. May this lucidity incite us all to plunge deep into baptizing waters that are at once chaotic and life-giving, and thus, the matrix of all becoming.

Catherine Keller's *Face of the Deep: A Theology of Becoming*, offers what is perhaps the first full theology of creation *ex profundis*. Keller argues with passion, wit and deep wisdom against the dominant (and dominating) theory of creation *ex nihilo* in the name of a complex, material, and messy creation. In the process she deconstructs the very heart of the domination of the "other" so common in Western religious traditions. *Face of the Deep* is a welcome addition to current theological debate that masterfully combines multiple fields of study in a "pluri-single" (172-82) reconstruction of process theism by way of postmodern thought. The book is both a feminist constructive theology and an extended commentary on Genesis 1.2 that draws on some of the best of Jewish and Christian scholarship. Keller constructs (both on the page and in the reader's imagination) a new place to begin thinking about the deepest questions of life and existence. The book is arranged in four parts, each of which adds necessary components to the vision of a theology of becoming. Part I, "Creation now and then," asks the question, "What happened to the chaos of Genesis 1.2?" (xix) and discloses "tehomophobic" and "tehomophilic" tendencies in the Bible as well as the thought of formative figures in the history of Christian theology. The persistent

connection between tehomophobia and gynophobia is stressed by way of reference to tehom's connection to Tiamat, the Babylonian goddess, which becomes a consistent refrain throughout the rest of the book. Part II, "Orthodoxies of nothing," discusses the development of the doctrine of creation *ex nihilo*. Starting with the efforts of the early Fathers of the Church to suppress the biblical legacy of tehom Keller finds hope in Augustine's flirtation with tehom in his theory of creation from the "nothingsomething" (*nihil aliquid* 74-5). Karl Barth's efforts at demonizing the deep as "das Nichtige" are ironically the jumping off point for a search for a "third way," neither *ex nihilo* nor of a preexistent chaos (84-99). Part III, "Monsters of hermeneutics," engages in this search for, and the construction of, such a "third way," between *ex nihilo* and preexistent chaos. Drawing on the thought of numerous biblical scholars and other postmodern theorists along with the book of Job and Moby Dick Keller develops a "tehomic hermeneutic." Part IV, "Creatio *ex profundis*," presents Keller's constructive theological work outright. Commenting on and simultaneously rewriting the central iconic elements of Genesis 1.2 part four elaborates a theology of becoming out of the depths of chaos along with the theological implications for Christology, incarnation, relations with the 'other,' and the concept of God. Gone is the omnipotent, singular, kingly Creator *ex nihilo*. "He" is replaced by a "trinity" of ambiguous plurality, interdependence and commingling: tehom, elohim, and ruach. Far from calling for the simple replacement of Creator Father with Procreative Mother Keller asks us to "bear with" differences and relations (223). The plurality of the universe is shown to be the outcome of complex relationality all the way "back" to the beginning and "down" to the depths of existence. For all its strengths and breadth Face of the Deep does have notable deficiencies. Keller's project assumes a Whiteheadian process cosmology and seems to take it for granted that it is the only viable scheme. In so doing she ignores the work of Robert Neville, who not only critiques process and postmodern thought but has expounded his own version of *creatio ex nihilo* for decades. Keller concludes that a theology of becoming is necessary on exegetical, ethical, and philosophical grounds but assumes that creation *ex nihilo* always means domination and the problems of theodicy. Keller confesses that her tehomic theology is one of becoming and not origin and so is not concerned with what might have been "before" the spatiotemporal matrix in which we live (157). Face of the Deep makes a convincing case that the watery beginnings of Genesis were intentionally suppressed and demonized, but does this not also miss the point that *ex nihilo* answers a different question than the one a tehomic theology of becoming does? The theory of creation from nothing, for whatever else it does, and not-with-standing its flaws, answers the question of origin and the related ontological question; why is there something rather than nothing? A theology of becoming has no interest in such questions because they point to a "something" that is the

transcendent one to the universe's many. It would have been a great addition if Keller had engaged the thought of Neville whose interest extends beyond (not "above") cosmological creativity (which is, as Keller contends, always from something) to ontological creativity. Though not without ethical and philosophical support Keller's predisposition against ontotheology would have made an appraisal of counter-criticism from postmodern proponents of creation *ex nihilo* a valuable addition to the persuasiveness of her argument. Instead, *Face of the Deep* uses postmodern methods to attack positions developed largely before (post)modernity and as such the book falls into a kind of anachronism. Despite these criticisms *Face of the Deep* remains an excellent study which offers many possible avenues for future research and constructive work. Keller's realization that it is the fundamental (though not foundational) nature of differences which is the root of all current theological debate is hugely important. She rightly contends that without a revised understanding of beginnings (and endings) that there can be no hope of embracing and bearing with the plurality present in the universe. Especially notable is the open use of resources from Protestant, Roman Catholic, Eastern Orthodox, and Jewish tradition. Though extraordinarily well crafted *Face of the Deep* is not an easy read. Keller's book reads like poetry at times, a welcome, and perhaps necessary development for theology since "what is the actual work of theology-but an incantation at the edge of uncertainty?"(xviii). However, due to its breadth of sources relatively few readers will have the expertise to follow the entire argument. That said advanced students and professionals in nearly every field in the humanities should benefit from reading (and rereading) Keller's theology of becoming.

Catherine Keller is one of the most powerful theologians to write in our time. Her thorough, creative, brilliant and intensely attentive reexamination of the most common and traditional assumptions and dogmatic formations regarding creation is one of the most important contributions to contemporary theology. She has read widely and deeply to bring into deep and effective conversation with theology recent developments in chaos and complexity science, literary theory, race and gender studies as well as issues concerning ecology and economy. For anybody who is interested in how science and religion might communicate today around issues of the universe as creation, this is one of the important books to consider. Keller effectively makes the case that what most of 'orthodox' theology has assumed as 'fact', a 'creaton out of nothing,' is in fact a later development and not supported in the biblical text. Rather, the biblical text, as well as a fair number of theologians in early Christianity and Judaism knew of a different account, where God's spirit hovers over the watery, resonant, responsive Deep. Keller argues further that a theology that must affirm a 'creation out of nothing'

where God is the only, unilateral agent, whether found in conservative or liberal/liberationist circles ends up reinscribing a unilaterally acting God, a macho bully, perhaps even, that in the end does not allow creation to respond and interact in a way that affirms God's profound, inviting love to all creation. Keller argues that this erection of the masculine God is performed over the dismembered body of a female goddess, as well as the suppression of women and femininity in the deep, the sea that was inscribed as squishy, wet, squirmy, hiding abominable monsters. Furthermore, Keller describes how racism as in the case of 'light supremacism' of Christianity often has linked light and dark with skin color, moral valor, and goodness. Keller encourages us to 'face the deep' in our own selves, so we can repent of forms of racism and sexism, internalized and externalized, and embrace, more deeply our own and others' multifaceted selves. This, she suggests, will allow us to more fully hear, respond and engage God's consistent lure, God's complex invitation to live and love our lives to the fullest, and to heal and be healed in the process.

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