

Editorial: Theology, imagination, and the arts

Readers of *Theology in Scotland* may have noticed that several recent issues of the journal have been devoted to a particular theme. This issue is no exception: it is dedicated to an exploration of the relationship between theology and imagination. The inspiration for this particular subject arose out of our desire to honour the legacy of the late Rev Prof D. W. D. Shaw, a founding member of the editorial board of *Theology in Scotland*, whose life and work are celebrated here in a short piece of reflection by the Very Rev Dr Russell Barr. With the generous support of the Trustees of the Hope Trust, we have recently been able to hold the first lecture in recognition of Bill Shaw's contribution to the field of theology in Scotland. Delivered by Oxford University's Prof Paul Fiddes, it considered the human capacity for imagination, theology, and the literary arts, and we are delighted to offer it to our readers here. Looking at the interplay between creativity and order, Fiddes underscores the indispensable role that images play in theology alongside its commitment to concepts, and argues for the necessity of imagination for the work of theology as a response to God's self-revelation. Without it, he contends, theology finds itself devoid of movement and life, stuck in an attempt to enforce complete conceptual control on imagination's creations.

Reflecting on another medium – that of visual art – the next contribution takes the form of a conversation between Dr Deborah Lewer and Dr Rowan Williams. Lewer's skilful hosting of the conversation, and her own introductory reflections on word and image point to the risk and the promise involved in words *about* wordless works of art. As a theologian, poet, and former Archbishop of Canterbury, Williams highlights the ongoing, responsive, and dynamic relationship that human beings can develop with particular pieces of visual art. Such an interaction can be extended when a painting is responded to by another medium – for instance, that of a poem. It is in the transcendence and indeterminacy of a piece of art that Williams locates imagination's link to faith.

We then move to Dr Alison Jack's exploration of the spiritual significance of poetry and music as she reflects on the power that such media hold for the opening up of new possibilities, and indeed new realities, for those prepared to respond to such an invitation. Jack looks at

Editorial

the particular ways in which imagination can become an encounter with the divine as she considers Christine De Luca's poem "Like a Flaring Thing" and Olivier Messiaen's *Quartet for the End of Time*. Her consideration of the spiritual potential of art brings her into a dialogue with Paul Fiddes and Malcolm Guite, highlighting the role that creativity plays in the human response to God and God's self-revelation, and the interpretive ministry of poets, composers, and other artists.

For our 'Arts and Culture' corner, Eilidh Harris' piece continues the theme of exploring deeper spiritual realities by rooting them in the struggle for justice through art. As a metal musician and a poet, Harris shares some insights into her own, as well as other artists', creative practice as resistance and empowerment, particularly in relation to violence against women and girls. As someone who no longer subscribes to the Christian faith in God but remains in dialogue with theology and contemporary religious culture, Harris offers a thought-provoking reflection on the life-giving power of creative practice in the context of trauma.

In this issue, we are also introducing a new 'corner' – one exploring the legacy of the Gifford Lectures in natural theology, delivered at the ancient Scottish universities since 1888. Not only do these lectures present a fascinating picture of various issues and subjects which have shaped and highlighted the intellectual landscape in Scotland and beyond for the past 134 years, but they also offer an opportunity for a renewed engagement with their topics and presenters. Dr Jonathan Birch introduces the lectures, their founder, and one of the contributors, Baroness Mary Warnock, whose 1992 lectures on imagination and understanding speak directly to the theme of our issue.

The editorial board of *Theology in Scotland* also want to mark here an exceptional contribution of one of the founders of the journal, Prof David Fergusson. After many years of ministry and work in Scotland, David Fergusson – the first Chair of the editorial board of *Theology in Scotland* – has taken up the post of Regius Professor of Divinity at the University of Cambridge, which also brought about his retirement from the board. In this issue, he is interviewed by Dr Joanna Leidenhag, sharing a little of his own theological journey as well as insights into Scottish theology. We are truly grateful for Prof Fergusson's many years of service on the board, and his contribution to the shaping of Scotland's theological world.

In the reviews section, readers will find an essay by Prof David Jasper covering four relatively recent works which, taken together, offer a further

Editorial

contribution to this issue's theme. *Scottish Religious Poetry: From the Sixth Century to the Present*, edited by Meg Bateman et al., Edwin Morgan's *A.D.: A Trilogy of Plays on the Life of Jesus*; James Robertson's *News of the Dead*, and David Brown's *God and Grace of Body: Sacrament in Ordinary* all look at, or represent, different religious expressions. Looking at these examples of poetry, dramatic art, fiction, and theology, Jasper draws out the significance of landscape and place in the shaping of Scottish religious sentiments, whether a long time ago or in the current, post-Christian, times. In addition to this essay-length review, as usual there are several other shorter reviews of recent books which have caught our reviewers' attention.

Expressed in different media, embedded and embodied in different periods, explored in its different aspects, imagination remains an essential, if often ignored, feature of faithful and fecund theology. Imagination is always needed, but perhaps especially in times like these, under what feel like very dark clouds of a violent, unjust, unsafe world. Faced with the threat of our world's self-destruction, theological imagination may be all that keeps us, and our hope, alive. Perhaps this issue will also bring some encouragement to our readers as they continue reflecting on the imagination's role in life and faith.

Lina Toth
Editor

John McIntyre, *Faith, Theology and Imagination*

In 1984 the late Professor John McIntyre gave the Margaret Harris Lectures on Religion in Dundee, which were published in 1987 by the Handsel Press as *Faith, Theology and Imagination*. It was one of the early signs of a renewed interest in the imagination among theologians, and in the book a major dialogue is with George MacDonald. The publishers have a few copies of this book left, and would be willing to supply them at the reduced price of £6 each including postage.

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