

Editorial: Suffering and Evil

This issue will seek to examine theological perspectives on suffering and its relationship to evil and consider how Christian communities can respond both in meaningful and creative ways. I must credit our outgoing Editor, Dr Lina Toth, for choosing such an important theme for this issue. I am immensely grateful for the creativity, theological depth, and organisation that Lina has brought to the journal during her tenure, and for her kind support as I have stepped into my role as its new Editor.

The problem of suffering and evil has long confronted theologians, and yet it feels particularly urgent in our present age. Suffering has taken on new shapes and contours; evil has found new limits of horror. Technology enables both greater destruction (through advanced weaponry like drone strikes and ecological exploitation, for example) and faster communication of that destruction. Our devices refresh constantly with an unending stream of horrors: genocides, mass shootings, terror attacks, and natural disasters. It is no exaggeration to say that we now carry the suffering of the world, and evidence of its evil, in our pockets.

Theology is always articulated in the context of suffering and evil. It is the constant backdrop of theological questions, and the reality that underscores theological work. The articles and contributions in this issue are grounded in a deep awareness of the world as it is, not as an abstraction but as a place marked by the complexity of pain, struggle, and resilience. Together, they respond to a series of pressing questions: how do we speak of suffering in theological terms without reducing its complexity or erasing its reality? How can we bear witness to pain in ways that honour the voices of those who suffer, rather than silence them? How might we think and act faithfully in the presence of suffering and evil without becoming complicit in their continuation?

Joanna Leidenhag leads this conversation with the text of her D. W. D. Shaw Memorial Lecture, delivered earlier this year at the University of Glasgow. Her cosmic reimagining of Romans 8 invites us to consider the pain of non-human creation and the possibility that consciousness itself is woven into the fabric of the universe. Drawing on panpsychism (the idea that consciousness is fundamental and ubiquitous throughout the universe), her work challenges anthropocentric theodicies to expand the scope of redemption to all creation. Elsewhere in the New Testament, Paul

Wilson turns to Acts 9 and the encounter between Ananias and Saul. He offers a peacebuilding lens rooted in the Contact Hypothesis, proposing the Ananias-Saul narrative as a theological model for responding to evil and suffering. Informed by his experiences of working with refugees in Glasgow's East End, he suggests a new church praxis which remains grounded in and attentive to the lived realities of people's suffering.

Graham Meiklejohn interrogates the limits of theodicy itself, navigating between Niebuhr's realism and Cone's prophetic critique. He proposes a third way, one that neither resigns itself to suffering nor naively believes it can be solved, but instead insists on faithful resistance. Michael Newlands draws a poignant parallel between the Gerasene Demoniac and those living with dementia, urging the church to resist the social death of isolation through intentional, compassionate presence. His proposed theology of care is grounded in the incarnational love of God.

Next, I am accompanied by my colleague and friend John Swinton in an epistolary dialogue, shaped by the format of early Christian letters as well as conversations begun last year during the Church of Scotland's Chalmers Lectures series. Our viewpoints both intersect and diverge, however we do agree that suffering, as it is lived and experienced uniquely by each person, resists resolution through solitary reflection alone. It calls instead for shared, dialogical inquiry, and our letters to one another form a small attempt at this. Alison Peden's article explores the theological and pastoral implications of eschatological consolation through the lens of Bertrand Brasnett's work. As Principal of Edinburgh Theological College (1930–42), Brasnett was a pivotal figure in the British divine passibility debate, which gained momentum in response to the traumas of the two world wars. The article examines how divine suffering intersects with human trauma and pastoral care and puts forward Brasnett's vision as a radical redefinition of consolation, not as the erasure of pain but as its integration into the enduring love of God.

The issue concludes with David Young's creative reflection on military chaplaincy, which describes his experience of leading a Remembrance Sunday service at Reichswald Forest Cemetery in Germany. His work is a meditation on remembrance as vocation, and as an action that gives testimony to resurrection hope.

The work in this issue engages directly with the lived realities of evil and suffering, without evading them or abstracting God's presence within them. Instead, it reminds us that theology, whether shaped in churches,

Editorial

classrooms, or everyday life, can, at its best, offer meaningful insight in the face of relentless hardship. Just as past theologians wrestled with the brokenness of the world, we too must stay engaged with the pressing issues of our time. It is my hope, as I begin my tenure as Editor, that the pages of *Theology in Scotland* will be a place for theological conversations that represent a faithful wrestling with contemporary challenges, rooted in tradition yet open to fresh insight; a space where voices from diverse contexts and convictions can engage deeply, critically, and constructively with the questions that shape our lives, our communities, and our witness in both Scotland and the world.

Katie Cross
Editor