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Editorial: Migration, displacement, and belonging

Migration has rarely been far from public attention in recent years. Across the United Kingdom, news headlines have been occupied with people seeking asylum, the shape of borders, and the question of national identity. In Scotland, these discussions have taken on a particular significance. Demographic challenges have highlighted the importance of inward migration for population growth,[1] and it has been implied that the Scottish public is more tolerant of immigration than elsewhere in the UK.[2] Despite this, anti-immigration rhetoric and public protests have continued to intensify. Throughout Scotland, waves of protests have taken place outside hotels and temporary accommodation where migrants are living. Anti-migrant groups have raised saltire flags in public places, intended as symbols of national identity. As former First Minister Humza Yousaf has recently concluded, 'Scotland, I'm afraid, of course is becoming more intolerant.'[3]

Yet migration itself is nothing new. Human history is replete with patterns of movement. Migration is not a marginal theme within theology either. We might point to the stories of exile, displacement, and homecoming in Scripture, or the way in which Jesus' own life is framed by experiences of displacement and refuge. More recently, however, Christianity's relationship to migration has become increasingly contested. While churches and faith-based organisations play vital roles in supporting migrant communities across Scotland,[4] Christian symbols and language have sometimes been appropriated by anti-immigration movements.[5] These developments

[1] Scottish Government, *Migration: Supporting the Future of Scotland's Economy and Communities* (August 29, 2026), https://www.gov.scot/publications/migration-supporting-future-scotlands-economy-communities.

[2] See for example Aubrey Westfall's chapter "The Public: Attitudes Towards Immigration in Scotland," in Aubrey L. Westfell, *The Politics of Immigration in Scotland* (Edinburgh University Press, 2022).

[3] BBC News, "Scotland becoming less tolerant to immigration – Humza Yousaf," https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/cp3qkvr6pl4o.

[4] See for example the Church of Scotland's "Scottish Faiths Action for Refugees," https://www.churchofscotland.org.uk/about-us/departments/faith-action-programme-committees-and-departments/scottish-faiths-action-for-refugees.

[5] A 2025 investigation by The Ferret, a Scottish non-profit media cooperative,

remind us that discussions of migration are rarely *only* about migration, instead revealing competing understandings of what it means to belong.

It is against this backdrop that we present this issue of *Theology in Scotland*. We do so with a sense of urgency. The questions explored by our contributors, some of whom are migrants themselves, are not merely theoretical. They concern realities that continue to shape the lives of individuals and communities across Scotland. As co-editors, we are conscious that our interest in these themes is personal as well as professional, as both of us come from families whose histories have been shaped by migration. Our editor, Katie Cross, is a second-generation migrant whose father was born in Cyprus and whose grandparents migrated to Scotland in 1954, moving between the two countries for several years before settling in Glasgow in 1961. Our guest editor for this issue, Nuam Hatzaw, is a 1.5 generation migrant who moved to Scotland from Myanmar when she was a young girl. This acknowledgement of our personal migration histories is intended not only for reasons of intellectual transparency. It is also a recognition of the inextricable ways in which life experiences and histories shape our thinking and worldview, as several of the articles in this issue affirm. Indeed, Nuam's own contribution discusses her complicated feelings regarding belonging in Scotland. Her experience highlights the methodological and ethical challenges that arise when conducting qualitative research on a topic of personal significance. She explores the importance of negotiating between academic work and personal investment, and in doing so considers the ways in which lived experience can both enrich and complicate the research process.

In her article, Mishal Francis foregrounds the human realities of refugee experience that are often obscured by political rhetoric and statistical analysis. Through a careful account of her own lived experience, Mishal reminds readers that migration debates always involve people whose lives cannot be reduced to policy categories or public discourse. Similarly,

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reported warnings from academics and anti-extremism researchers that far-right groups were 'weaponising Christianity' for political purposes. The report noted that groups such as Britain First and supporters of Tommy Robinson had increasingly used Christian rhetoric, symbols and imagery to mobilise support. Billy Briggs and Jamie Mann, "Far right groups are weaponising Christianity, warn experts," The Ferret, 4th May 2025: https://www.theferret.scot/far-right-are-weaponising-christianity-warn-experts/.

Stephen Ogbonna's article on multi-faith chaplaincy as a third space of belonging draws attention to the personal and communal dimensions of displacement. In doing so, Stephen demonstrates the importance of scholarship that remains responsive to lived realities rather than speaking about communities from a distance. Esa Aldegheri's contribution, which considers the role of Scottish faith-based organisations in their support of refugee integration, underlines this challenge to scholars and practitioners to consider how research itself relates to the communities it discusses. Her narrative-based interdisciplinary approach explores faith narratives of 'refugee journeys' as a key point of theological engagement, which in turn supports faith communities to embody hospitality and solidarity with migrants and displaced people.

Other contributors offer hopeful visions of belonging that emerge through everyday practices and acts of care. Wai-Ying Ng's auto-ethnography of urban food rescuing points to the formation of dignity and solidarity through the labour of finding and sharing surplus food in Edinburgh. She connects this to the Old Testament practice of 'gleaning', which connects the sojourner to both land and community. Joe Sikora and Anupama Ranawana explore religious and cultural identity through two Catholic secondary schools in Glasgow with diverse student bodies. Their work reflects on student activities designed to deepen knowledge and understanding of other faiths and cultures, and to raise awareness of the importance of respect for all. Both of these articles remind us that belonging can be created through deliberate encounters centred on connection, understanding, and curiosity.

This issue also features Paul Wilson's report on Paula Fredriksen's Gifford Lectures at the University of Edinburgh, delivered in May 2026. While not intentionally focused on the themes of this issue, Paul's reflections serve as a valuable reminder that sweeping explanations and narratives must always remain attentive to the complexity and particularity of lived experience. This is insightful for discussions of migration and displacement, which frequently resist simplification. Similar themes are to be found in Jock Stein's searing and beautifully crafted series of *Migrant Poems*. They explore the tragic death of Alan Kurdi, consider the gift that migration is to countries receiving new citizens, and trace the migratory path of Glasgow's patron saint, Mungo.

Despite the diversity of perspectives represented by contributors from across Scotland and beyond, several common themes are woven through

the articles in this issue. Firstly, to quote an ever-prescient phrase from the feminist movement, the 'personal is the political'. Our contributions repeatedly show that large-scale realities like migration are experienced in intimate and deeply personal ways, and not as abstract concepts. Secondly, these articles emphasise the importance of academic work that remains accountable and responsive to the communities it engages, particularly when these are vulnerable or marginalised – such as migrant communities. Finally, the contributions to this issue offer reasons for hope. Even amid polarised public discourse, they point to possibilities for belonging and solidarity, showing examples of where this is already happening across Scotland. Together, these articles remind us that belonging and community can be intentionally fostered and carefully nurtured – over and against rhetoric that isolates membership along purely ethnic lines. Instead, as this issue shows, practices of advocacy, pastoral care, or sharing of resources can help create an alternative understanding of community.

Perhaps most importantly, this issue emphasises that migration is not a problem to be solved, or a political challenge to be managed. It is an enduring feature of human life that raises profound questions about who we are, how we relate to others, and what it means to belong. These questions are of course political, but they are also deeply theological.

Katie Cross and Nuam Hatzaw (Guest Editor)

We dedicate this issue to the memory of Fivos Scholarios, Katie's Pappou (grandfather), who passed away during the production of this issue. Born in Xylotymbou, Cyprus, he made his home in Scotland with his wife, Georgia, and their children. He is dearly missed.

Rev Dr David Lyall

We are saddened to hear of the passing of David Lyall, who served as Editor of *Theology in Scotland* from 2002 to 2008. Drawing on experience in parish ministry, hospital chaplaincy, and academia, where he taught Christian ethics and practical theology at Edinburgh and St Andrews, he brought a wealth of wisdom and discernment to the editorship and played a significant role in the journal's development. We remember him with gratitude and affection.