

PAPERS AND PUBLICATION

Those who wish to present a paper should send a summary (500 words at most) by email to St. Andrew's Institute by 15 September 2016. The Organizing Committee selects papers for the Conference and sends invitations to the speakers. The working language of the conference will be English.

Upon arrival at the conference every participant will receive summaries of all the papers and the conference programme. Papers are scheduled for 20 minutes each. Some of the papers will be published in St. Andrew's quarterly *Pages: Theology, Culture, Education*. Registration form can be found on St. Andrew's website www.standrews.ru. Registrations, summaries and papers should be sent to:

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ORGANIZATION AND ACCOMMODATIONS

The Conference will assemble on Wednesday, 26 October for the opening ceremony and the first session in the evening. Participants will depart after breakfast on Saturday, 29 October.

The Conference will be held in the recognised spiritual and academic centre – the Monastery of Bose. Accommodation and meals will be provided by the organizers.

St. Andrew's Biblical Theological Institute

PATRONS: METROPOLITAN KALLISTOS OF DIOKLEIA, LORD RICHARD HARRIES,
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ST. ANDREW'S
BIBLICAL THEOLOGICAL
INSTITUTE

(Moscow, Russia)



MONASTERY OF BOSE

(Magnano, Italy)

Invitation and Call for Papers

INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE

THEOLOGY OF SUFFERING
IN ECUMENICAL PERSPECTIVE

26–29 October 2016
Bose, Italy

Visit our web-site
WWW.STANDREWS.RU

THEME OF THE CONFERENCE

Suffering is an experience common to all human beings (indeed to all living creatures) and is often considered to be part and parcel of human existence. No one likes sufferings, so our normal reaction is to avoid or alleviate them as much as possible. The seemingly easiest way to do this is to eliminate their direct cause, e.g. to cure one's disease or to satisfy one's hunger.

There are, however, sufferings brought about by the imperfections of human society at large, making the life of whole social groups difficult or even unbearable. This includes wars, poverty, different forms of inequality and discrimination, and other kinds of social injustice. Those who live all their lives under such conditions (usually built into existing social structures) may take them for natural and often do not even try to criticize or fight them. Dealing with such sufferings on an individual level is not enough. To eliminate them, we have to struggle against those social injustices that condition these sufferings.

The theology of suffering, i.e. reflection on suffering from the perspective of God-human relations, has to deal with both of the above aspects, individual and social. In the past, theology considered suffering mainly on an individual level, as one's personal sufferings, and the ability to endure pains and hardships was usually praised as an ideal for Christians. Christianity, however, was often part of unjust social orders and served their justification and consolidation. So this "ideal", interpreting Christian meekness and humility as mere obedience and submission to church and state authorities, was often aimed at silencing voices raised against existing social injustice.

It was not until modern times that theological criticism was directed not only at the weaknesses of sinful human nature but at the sinfulness of established social orders and institutions (religion and church included). Suffering conditioned by vicious social structures and political

regimes was thus brought to the fore of theological reflection. This has radically changed contemporary theology, especially after World War II. There emerged new trends such as theology after Auschwitz and after the GULAG, liberation theology, feminist theology, black theology, etc. that make the sufferings of the persecuted, marginalized, disadvantaged and oppressed the starting point of any theological discourse.

At the same time, theology, if it wants to be realistic, can hardly hope for the total eradication of suffering. Pain and suffering remain part of the mystery of human existence and cannot be fully reduced to bad social conditions or personal circumstances. For Christians, human suffering should always be perceived in the light of the passion of Jesus. Through their participation in his sufferings, by bearing their cross, Christians become united with God. This especially true when they suffer for the name of Jesus, thus becoming his witnesses, or martyrs, as St. Ignatius of Antioch vividly describes in his *Letter to the Romans* not long before he himself becomes a martyr. This mystery should always be a subject of deep theological reflection.

This unity with God is closely connected with unity among Christians themselves. Jesus' prayer for the unity of his disciples (John 17:21) shows that we cannot be united with God and yet divided among ourselves. Sufferings and death for the name of Jesus transcend all existing confessional and denominational bounds. This *ecumenism of blood* which Pope Francis speaks about is becoming an important aspect of today's search for Christian unity, no less important than the overcoming of doctrinal disagreements between different churches.

The purpose of the forthcoming conference is to reflect on suffering from a theological ecumenical perspective, especially in view of the different challenges Christianity is facing today, such as a new wave of persecutions and violence in the Middle Eastern countries, Africa and other parts of the world.