

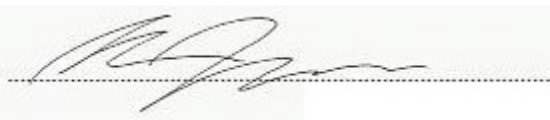
***Christian Theologies of Suffering across the Centuries:  
An Examination of Suffering and Grief in the works of  
Gregory the Great, Julian of Norwich,  
Jeremy Taylor, C.S. Lewis and Ivone Gebara***

Submitted by Molly Field James, to the University of Exeter as a dissertation  
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## ABSTRACT

This dissertation explores theologies of suffering through engagement with five theologians from across fifteen centuries of the Christian tradition: Gregory the Great, Julian of Norwich, Jeremy Taylor, C.S. Lewis and Ivone Gebara. It uses a typological method to examine the types of responses that are advocated by each theologian, and the relation of their responses to five theological touchstones: Humanity, Sin and Evil; God's Providence; Salvation; Christ; and Eternal Life. The Introductory Chapter provides an exploration of the definitions and etymologies of suffering and grief; a description of the typological method; an examination of notable relevant literature; and an introduction to the five thinkers. Chapter One is an examination of the life and writings of the 6<sup>th</sup> century pope Gregory the Great, with particular focus on *The Book of the Pastoral Rule* and *Moralia*. Gregory understands suffering to be a discipline sent by God to the faithful. Chapter Two is an examination of the life and *Revelations* text of the 13<sup>th</sup> century English mystic Julian of Norwich, who focuses on the reward God desires to give those who suffer. Chapter Three is an examination of the life and writings of 17<sup>th</sup> century Anglican bishop Jeremy Taylor, with particular focus on *Holy Living and Holy Dying*. Taylor places an emphasis on the lifelong practice of faithfulness in preparation for death. Chapter Four is an examination of the life and writings of 20<sup>th</sup> century Anglican theologian and author C. S. Lewis, with particular attention to *The Problem of Pain*, *The Chronicles of Narnia*, *A Grief Observed*, and *Letters to Malcom*. Lewis offers the example of one who is willing to engage with the depth of his grief and to question God on his road to acceptance. Chapter Five is an examination of the life and writings of contemporary Brazilian, feminist and liberation theologian Ivone Gebara, with particular focus on her book *Out of the Depths* and her engagement with Latin American author Isabel Allende. Gebara questions traditional

understandings of suffering, as well as when suffering is to be accepted and when suffering is unjust and should be combated. The Concluding Chapter constructs a contemporary theology of suffering drawing on the insights and wrestling with the challenges raised by the varying perspectives of the five theologians. The goal is to provide a hopeful and nuanced way of thinking theologically about suffering for contemporary Christians. The contemporary theology affirms the importance of the call, found in Gebara, to combat unjust suffering through acts of love and mercy, while also affirming that acceptance of the reality of endemic suffering, found in all five theologians, can provide one with opportunities to grow spiritually, live more faithfully and to experience the blessings in the midst of suffering that are a foretaste of heavenly bliss.

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