

Engaging with Poverty in the Early Church and Today

A collaborative project of the Centre for the Social-Scientific Study of the Bible at St Mary's University, Twickenham, Tearfund, and Caritas (Diocese of Westminster), supported by Caritas (Diocese of Westminster) and Bible Society

This exciting and innovative project is a collaboration between three organisations. It focuses on *the significance of early Christianity for modern means of addressing poverty*. On the one hand, this focus reflects the institutional identity of the host organisation, St Mary's University, Twickenham, which was founded in 1850 as a teacher-training college for poor Catholic children. On the other hand, we are not simply interested in holding up modern practices to a supposed early Christian example. Rather, we are interested in the complex ways in which the early Christian ideas and practices relate to modern ideas and practices and vice versa. In other words, the conference aims to address both continuities and discontinuities between the ancient world and today. We are most interested in coming to grips with the full complexity of the matter, in order to inform and engage our intended audience of church leaders, those working in NGOs concerned with poverty, and thoughtful people, both Christian and not. The project will have two major outputs: a conference and a book.

For the conference, we have designed the programme in order to be most beneficial to individuals and organisations currently involved in addressing poverty in its many forms, as a space for critical thought and discussion. So we shall ground our thinking in rigorous study of poverty and its alleviation in both earliest Christianity and today's world, while presenting the fruit of this study accessibly for those who do not have formal training in these areas. In this light, we are having eight sessions in total during the conference (see below). In every session except the closing session (which will feature a panel discussion), we are pairing an expert in early Christianity in its Jewish and Graeco-Roman settings with an expert in modern strategies for addressing poverty and benefaction. They will address the same topic from their respective areas of expertise. After the two presentations, each session will feature 30 minutes for questions, answers, and discussion.

The book will follow from the conference, and will continue the 'conversation' style of the conference by pairing the essays in similar manner to the conference programme. Our strong hope and aim is that the book will continue the process of engaging, informing and stimulating thoughtful responses to poverty in all its forms today.

We are very grateful for financial support for the conference from St Mary's University, Bible Society and Caritas (Diocese of Westminster).

Engaging with Poverty in the Early Church and Today

Friday 4 and Saturday 5 December 2015 at St Mary's University, Twickenham

Friday 4 December

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- 9.00–9.15 Prayers [*The Revd Mgr Professor Rod Strange*]
- 9.15–9.30 Welcome and introduction to the conference [*Steve Walton*]
- 9.30–11.00 *Poverty and Its Causes* [chair: *Steve Walton*]
 “Poverty and Its Causes in the Early Church” – Lynn Cohick, Professor of New Testament, Wheaton College
 “Poverty and Its Causes Today” – Katie Harrison, Head of Media, Tearfund
 Discussion
- 11.00–11.30 Coffee/Tea
- 11.30–13.00 *Benefaction: What It Is and What It Looks Like* [chair: *Virginia Lockett*]
 “Benefaction in the Early Church” – Bruce W. Longenecker, Professor of Religion & W. W. Melton Chair, Baylor University
 “Benefaction Today” – John Coleby, Caritas (Diocese of Westminster)
 Discussion
- 13.00–14.00 Lunch
- 14.00–15.30 *Patronage and Being Patronised* [chair: *Hannah Swithinbank*]
 “Patronage in the Early Church” – Steve Walton, Professor of New Testament, St Mary's University, Twickenham
 “Patronage Today” – Helen Hekel, Coordinator for Tearfund's Sexual Violence work
 Discussion
- 15.30–16.00 Coffee/Tea
- 16.00–17.30 *Raising Funds in One Place, Giving to Another* [chair: *David Parish*]
 “Paul and the Gift for the Jerusalem Church” – John Barclay, Lightfoot Professor of Divinity, University of Durham
 “Gift Distributions Today” – The Revd Virginia Lockett, UK Churches Team Director, Tearfund
 Discussion
- 18.00 *Conference Dinner* at La Dolce Vita Restaurant, near St Mary's University

Saturday 5 December

- 9.00–9.15 Prayers [*Hannah Swithinbank*]
- 9.15–10.45 *Poverty, Choice, and Dehumanisation* [chair: James Crossley]
“Poverty and Dehumanisation in Early Christianity” — Myrto Theocharous, Professor of Theology and Biblical Studies, Greek Bible College, Athens
“Poverty and Dehumanisation Today” — Ellie Hughes, Director, Riverbank Trust
Discussion
- 10.45–11.15 Coffee/Tea
- 11.15–12.45 *The “Undeserving Poor”: The Rhetoric and Theological Development of a Problematic Category* [chair: David Parish]
“The ‘Undeserving Poor’ in the Early Church” — Fiona Gregson, Birmingham
“The ‘Undeserving Poor’ Today” — Hannah Swithinbank, Researcher, Integral Mission Team, Tearfund
Discussion
- 12.45–13.45 Lunch
- 13.45–15.30 *State, Church, and Civil Society: Who is Responsible for the Poor?* [chair: John Coleby]
Brief presentation by Bible Society
“Poverty and the Powers in the Early Church” — Christopher Hays, Professor of New Testament, Fundación Universitaria Seminario Bíblico de Colombia
“Poverty and the Powers Today” — The Rt Hon. Stephen Timms, MP
Discussion
- 15.30–16.00 Coffee/Tea
- 16.00–17.30 “*The Poor Will Always be among You*” [chair: Steve Walton]
“The Poor Will Always be among You: Poverty, Education, and the Catholic Ideal” — Francis Campbell, Vice-Chancellor, St Mary’s University, Twickenham
Panel Discussion with Craig Blomberg, Distinguished Professor of New Testament Denver Seminary, and Francis Davis, Professor of Communities and Public Policy, University of Birmingham, and St Mary’s University, Twickenham
- 17.30 Depart