

Poverty in the Early Church and Today



Poverty in the Early Church and Today

A Conversation

Edited by
Steve Walton and
Hannah Swithinbank

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How This Book Works

The Editors

Poverty is one of the most significant challenges our world today faces, and it is a particular challenge for Christians, who follow the Jesus who urges giving to the poor and who includes people in poverty among his highest concerns. The essays in this book offer a fresh angle on debates about poverty by bringing together people who have expertise and experience in alleviating poverty today with people who have expertise in the ancient worlds of the Bible. We bring them together in order to have a conversation about how Christians today might think about and act on poverty issues, informed by the way our ancestors-in-faith responded to poverty in their places and times.

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 conversation in this book 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 readers, whom we hope will include church leaders, people working in non-governmental organizations (NGOs) concerned with poverty and thoughtful people, both Christian and not.

We designed the book in order to be most beneficial to individuals and organizations currently involved in addressing poverty in its many forms, as a space for critical thought and discussion. Therefore, we ground our thinking in a 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, the heart of the conversation consists of eight sections.

Our book opens with two forewords, which are themselves thoughtful reflections on poverty, by Graham Tomlin, the Anglican Bishop of Kensington (London), and Cardinal Vincent Nichols, the Catholic Archbishop of Westminster. Justin Thacker then reflects on the ways we identify poverty and offers a valuable theological assessment.

The body of the book is a series of sets of four essays, in which we pair an expert in early Christianity in its Jewish and Graeco-Roman settings with an expert in modern strategies for addressing poverty and benefaction. They each address the same topic from their respective areas of expertise in a substantial essay, and then each author responds to their partner much more briefly, identifying points which are mutually informing and stimulating. In this way, we hope we shall both model and encourage profitable conversation between those primarily engaged in today's world and specialists in the biblical world.



Francis Campbell then discusses what it means to be a Catholic university in today's world of poverty, a 'case study' of Christian engagement with poverty. Finally, Craig Blomberg and Francis Davis review and reflect on the whole collection of essays as (respectively) a New Testament scholar and a Christian social thinker.

This book grew out of a conference 'Engaging with Poverty in the Early Church and Today' held at St Mary's University, Twickenham (London) in December 2015, and we are very grateful for the hospitality of the university. The project was the brainchild of Professor Chris Keith, Director of the St Mary's University Centre for the Social-Scientific Study of the Bible, and Mr David Parish, chair of the Hampton Fuel Allotment Charity, and became a partnership in money and kind between the university, Tearfund, Caritas (Diocese of Westminster) and the Bible Society, and we gratefully acknowledge the contributions of each of the partners. We are also thankful to Professor Francis Campbell, Vice Chancellor of St Mary's University, Twickenham, for his support and encouragement, including his own essay in this volume. Scott Robertson kindly provided the index for the volume.

During the conference, we contributed a portion of the registration fees to Riverside, a local Christian charity which works with single parents in poverty. Ellie Hughes, who writes in this book, was then the Director of Riverside's ministry. In similar vein, royalties from this book will be split between Tearfund and Caritas (Diocese of Westminster) to support their Christian engagement with people in poverty today.

Lent, 2018



Reflecting on Poverty

Bishop Graham Tomlin

A little while ago, I spent a day at homeless drop-in centre in one of the parishes I have responsibility for here in London. When we hear the word ‘homeless’, we probably imagine ragged, unkempt people with plastic bags, straggly beards and dirty clothes, people with little employment capacity, living in poverty and who have spent a good deal of their lives unemployed. In any gathering of people in the average homeless centre, there may be a fair number who fall under that description, but during that day, I found my preconceptions of homelessness, poverty and the reasons for it beginning to erode quite quickly. I am ashamed to say I tweeted early that day that I was going to spend the day with ‘a bunch of homeless people’ to which one person replied that they were very uncomfortable with that description – and they were exactly right.

Talking to several people over the day, I began to realize that ‘homeless’ is a fairly blunt category. This homeless drop-in centre had around sixty or so regulars but they were all there for different reasons. One elderly woman was not homeless – in fact, she had a very nice flat – but was desperately lonely since her husband died, and came along to find some people to talk to. Another had walked out of an old people’s home because he had kept getting drunk and had fallen out with those in charge. Others were sleeping on friends’ floors, some had recently arrived from other countries, a few were asylum seekers, unable to work while their cases were being heard and just wanted somewhere to stay dry and some company on another aimless and frustrating day.

I met an architect with an encyclopaedic knowledge of the dates of London City churches, a teacher of English as a Second Language and a retired research chemist. All the world was there. The one thing in common was some back story, something that had gone wrong in their lives. I heard one story of a man who had come to the centre who had been CEO of a large international airline. His child had died in an accident, the stress led to the break-up of his marriage, he then started drinking, which led to him losing his job, and soon he had lost family, home, income, job – in fact, everything – and he was now on the streets. Whether it was a bereavement, unemployment, a marriage breakdown, mental health issues, a physical accident or a chronically bad temper, something had led them to this point. Usually alcohol or drugs were involved in some way, a short-term comfort, but ultimately making the problem worse. What strikes you is how easily it could happen to anyone – even to you or me. In a sense, there are no such thing as homeless people, just people with different problems, who find it difficult to handle life when it gets really hard.

The day impressed upon me how complex poverty is and how many types there are. Alongside economic poverty there is also the poverty of loneliness, purposelessness,

or mental and psychological poverty. It also showed me that while Christians (and others) speak of 'the poor', that, too, is a blunt category. There might be a great deal of discussion around how to deal with poverty and how to help 'the poor'; but in the end, the poor are *people*, each with their own story, their own reasons for being economically disadvantaged, some of which are told in this volume, all having to deal with the debilitating and demoralizing effects of poverty in their own way.

A friend who works in disadvantaged areas of the United Kingdom once said to me that the problem is not so much that the rich do not help the poor, as they do not know the poor. A book on attitudes to poverty in the ancient and modern worlds is an excellent contribution to the complex set of issues surrounding poverty; yet my hope is that this book will not just provide intellectual stimulation but will also lead to a desire in those who read it not just to understand poverty but also to experience it, even if vicariously.

On my day at the homeless centre, the other people present were the volunteers, people who give time and energy to serve their guests, wash their feet, give legal or housing advice, cook breakfast, listen to their stories. Each one of us had our own problems and issues as well. None of us are self-sufficient and were never meant to be. We are all, whatever our economic circumstances, in need of a Saviour, someone who understands our story with its highlights and failures, who, 'though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that by his poverty you might become rich' (2 Cor. 8.9). That Saviour ministers to us through each other, through the words of life, encouragement and gospel we offer one another and through the gestures of love – a meal given, a new set of clothes given, a hand shaken – all bringing the possibility of change.

This transformation comes not just through remote donations, standing orders or cheques signed, however valuable they may be, but also through human contact, face to face, in which the incarnate Christ makes himself present in that interaction, both for the giver and the receiver, both as recipients of grace. Each word or act of love offered in the name of Christ becomes a word or act done to Christ and for Christ, as we work out our salvation with fear and trembling.

At the end of the day, people experiencing poverty of whatever kind need dignity, not dependence. They need to be treated as precious human beings, created and loved by God as they are, and dignity comes through human contact, not just through handouts. Only then will they find the dignity that enables them to take the hand that helps them out of poverty into self-respect and the ability to make their own contribution to the society in which they live.

If this book helps its readers not just to understand poverty but also to get to know one or two people for whom poverty is their daily experience, then it will have done its job well.

Graham Tomlin, Bishop of Kensington

Foreword

Cardinal Vincent Nichols

The Church has, from its beginning, been committed, in the name of Christ, to care for those in poverty. This book contributes to that commitment by bringing together present-day thinkers and activists with scholars of Scripture to reflect on this important theme. I welcome this book.

Catholics believe that faith must be put into action. The shape of this faith-in-action has been developed and brought together as Catholic Social Teaching, which identifies and expounds key themes, concerns and practices arising from our faith.¹

The dignity of human beings made in God's image and remade in the image of Christ by the Holy Spirit is a core principle in such thinking and action. Further, human existence is not meant to be individualistic, but personal, corporate and communal. Reflection in this book clarifies the working out of this principle and the way commitment to human dignity, and community, can transform people caught in poverty by empowering them to respond to its challenges.

Pope St John Paul II writes of Jesus:

... who, while *being God*, became like us in all things, devoted most of the years of his life on earth to *manual work* at the carpenter's bench. This circumstance constitutes in itself the most eloquent 'Gospel of work', showing that the basis for determining the value of human work is not primarily the kind of work being done but the fact that the one who is doing it is a person.²

Catholics and other Christians, thus, have the highest possible motivation to enable people in poverty to move out of dependence into interdependence and community, for in this they follow in the path of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. As Pope Francis has written,

Our faith in Christ, who became poor, and was always close to the poor and the outcast, is the basis of our concern for the integral development of society's most neglected members.³

¹ See, e.g., the Catholic Social Teaching website (<http://www.catholicsocialteaching.org.uk>, accessed March 2018).

² *Laborem Exercens* (On Human Work) §6 (italics original) (http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_14091981_laborem-exercens.html, accessed March 2018).

³ *Evangelii Gaudium* (The Joy of the Gospel) §186 (http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco_esortazione-ap_20131124_evangelii-gaudium.html#II.%E2%80%82The_inclusion_of_the_poor_in_society, accessed March 2018).

This is a key factor, as a number of the essays in this book realize, in opening pathways to work as an expression of human personhood, made in God's image and known by God.

I have the honour to be Chancellor of St Mary's University, Twickenham, which both hosted and co-sponsored the conference which produced the essays in this book. As a Catholic university, we are deeply committed to open education and learning to students from backgrounds of significant poverty, as our Vice Chancellor, Francis Campbell, makes clear in his essay in this book. I am delighted to commend this book. I wish it well in influencing and transforming attitudes and action by Christians of every tradition in the service of Christ among people in poverty.

✠ *Cardinal Vincent Nichols, Archbishop of Westminster*

Abbreviations

<i>1 Apol.</i>	Justin Martyr, <i>First Apology</i>
<i>2 Tars.</i>	Dio Chrysostom, <i>Second Tarsic Discourse</i>
AB	Anchor Bible
ABCD	Asset-based community development
<i>Acts Phil.</i>	<i>Acts of Phileas</i>
ANF	<i>Ante-Nicene Fathers</i>
<i>Ann.</i>	Tacitus, <i>Annals</i>
<i>Ant.</i>	Josephus, <i>Antiquities of the Jews</i>
<i>Apos. Trad.</i>	<i>Apostolic Tradition</i>
<i>Aug.</i>	Suetonius, <i>Divus Augustus</i>
BAFCS	The Book of Acts in its First Century Setting
BBR	<i>Bulletin of Biblical Research</i>
BDAG	Bauer, Walter, Frederick W. Danker, W. F. Arndt and F. W. Gingrich, eds, <i>A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature</i> , 3rd edn (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000)
BNTC	Black's New Testament Commentary
BR	<i>Biblical Research</i>
BTB	<i>Biblical Theology Bulletin</i>
ch./chs	chapter/chapters
<i>Cher.</i>	Philo, <i>On the Cherubim</i>
CIJ	<i>Corpus Inscriptiounum Judaicarum</i>
CIL	<i>Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum</i>
<i>Decalogue</i>	Philo, <i>On the Decalogue</i>
DRC	Democratic Republic of Congo
<i>EC</i>	<i>Early Christianity</i>
ed.	editor/edited by
<i>Ep.</i>	Pliny the Younger, <i>Epistles</i>
<i>Epig.</i>	Martial, <i>Epigrams</i>
ERT	<i>Evangelical Review of Theology</i>
<i>EvQ</i>	<i>Evangelical Quarterly</i>
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GNS	Good News Studies
HALOT	Koehler, Ludwig, Walter Baumgartner and Johann J. Stamm, eds, <i>The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament</i> , 4 vols., trans. Mervyn E. J. Richardson (Leiden: Brill, 1994–1999)
<i>HBT</i>	<i>Horizons in Biblical Theology</i>
<i>Herm. Simil.</i>	Hermas, <i>Similitudes</i>



<i>Hist</i>	<i>Historia</i>
<i>Hist.</i>	Sozomen, <i>Ecclesiastical History</i>
<i>Hist. eccl.</i>	Eusebius, <i>Ecclesiastical History</i>
<i>HTR</i>	<i>Harvard Theological Review</i>
ICC	International Critical Commentary
<i>IGRP</i>	<i>Inscriptiones Graecae ad res Romanas Pertinentes</i>
Int	Interpretation (commentary series)
<i>Int</i>	<i>Interpretation</i> (journal)
<i>J.W.</i>	Josephus, <i>Jewish War</i>
<i>JBL</i>	<i>Journal of Biblical Literature</i>
<i>JBQ</i>	<i>Jewish Bible Quarterly</i>
JCP	Jewish and Christian Perspectives
<i>JJS</i>	<i>Journal of Jewish Studies</i>
<i>JRS</i>	<i>Journal of Roman Studies</i>
JSJSup	Supplements to the Journal for the Study of Judaism
<i>JSNT</i>	<i>Journal for the Study of the New Testament</i>
JSNTSup	Journal for the Study of the New Testament Supplement Series
JSOTSup	Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series
<i>JTS</i>	<i>Journal of Theological Studies</i>
L&N	Louw, Johannes P., and Eugene A. Nida, eds, <i>Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament Based on Semantic Domains</i> . 2 vols., 2nd edn (New York: United Bible Societies, 1988)
LCL	Loeb Classical Library
LHBOTS	Library of Hebrew Bible/Old Testament Studies
LNTS	Library of New Testament Studies
LXX	Septuagint (Greek Old Testament)
MT	Masoretic Text (of the Hebrew Bible/Old Testament)
NCB	New Century Bible
NCBC	New Cambridge Bible Commentary
NGO	Non-governmental organization
NIBC	New International Biblical Commentary
NICNT	New International Commentary on the New Testament
NICOT	New International Commentary on the Old Testament
NIGTC	New International Greek Testament Commentary
NIV	New International Version (editions of 1984 and 2011)
<i>NovT</i>	<i>Novum Testamentum</i>
NRSV	New Revised Standard Version
n.s.	new series
NTM	New Testament Monographs
<i>NTS</i>	<i>New Testament Studies</i>
<i>Off.</i>	Cicero, <i>De officiis</i>
P. Mert.	Bell, H. Idris, and Colin H. Roberts, <i>A Descriptive Catalogue of the Greek Papyri in the Collection of Wilfred Merton</i> (London: Emery Walker, 1948)
<i>Perist.</i>	Prudentius, <i>Liber Peristphanon</i> (=Crowns of Martyrdom)



<i>Resp.</i>	Plato, <i>Republic</i>
RSV	Revised Standard Version
RTR	<i>Reformed Theological Review</i>
s.v.	under the word (Latin <i>sub verbo</i>)
SNTSMS	Society for New Testament Studies Monograph Series
SNTW	Studies in the New Testament and its World
SP	Sacra Pagina
TDNT	Kittel, Gerhard, and Gerhard Friedrich, eds, <i>Theological Dictionary of the New Testament</i> , 10 vols., trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964–1976)
THNTC	Two Horizons New Testament Commentary
TNIV	Today's New International Version
trans.	translator/translated by
<i>TynBul</i>	<i>Tyndale Bulletin</i>
UN	United Nations
WBC	Word Biblical Commentary
WUNT	Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament
ZNW	<i>Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft und die Kunde der älteren Kirche</i>

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