

THE MORNING STAR

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Lessons on the World Day of the Poor: Pope Francis and the anonymous Jesus

BY DAVID KUPP

I found Jesus a seven-minute walk from Wycliffe College. At first, I could not quite recognize him. Lying on a park bench, thickly covered with an old blanket, he was layered with snow. As I sat down on the bench beside him, though, I noticed his feet. The gaping instep wounds gave me pause, and then the crucifixion “aha.”

Though hard and bronzed, the life-sized sculpture invites a rest on his bench. Once you know the way, this nearly incognito Jesus is not hard to find: traverse southeast through Toronto’s Queen’s Park, head through the traffic lights, and find yourself at the front entrance of Regis College. Yes, Jesus is at Regis, and you can sit beside him for as long as you like. Day or night.

In a contemporary twist of irony the Homeless Jesus sculpture initially could not find a home; “nowhere to lay his head.” Authorities in archdioceses in Toronto and New York rejected the piece. Others – perhaps unfamiliar with the powerful Gospel texts that inspired it – labelled it controversial, generating a backlash.

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UPCOMING EVENTS

Nov 27, Wed
*Inaugural Lecture:
Stephen Chester on
Reading James, p. 4*

Nov 29, Fri
*Theology Pub Night on
Open Theism, p. 4*

Dec 4, 11, 18, Wed
*Voices of Advent with
Marion Taylor, p. 4*

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But these days Schmalz's bronze characters are finding a global welcome. And they have a new champion in the Vatican's head of state, whose same championship of the vulnerable, poor and marginalized continues to cause a global stir. Just weeks ago, Pope Francis oversaw the unveiling of "Angels Unaware," another of Schmalz's visual bronze translations of the Bible, in St. Peter's Square in Rome. His bronze crowd of 140 weeping, joyful and frightened migrants and refugees is a dramatic and timeless representation of their journey, and a biblical call to the faithful, summed up by the Pontiff in four verbs: "to welcome, protect, promote and integrate."

International days of celebration and remembrance are most often declared by the United Nations, but this one comes from Rome. The World Day of the Poor is a recent invention, launched by Pope Francis in 2017 as an annual celebration to occur on the 33rd Sunday of Ordinary Time. This year it fell on Sunday, November 17. Homeless Jesus sculptures were unveiled in numerous locations around the world to mark the Day.

Why does the Pope think the world needs Homeless Jesus and the World Day of the Poor? In his original message for the Day's launch, Francis insists that:

"The marginalization painfully experienced by millions of persons cannot go on for long. Their cry is growing louder and embraces the entire earth... The option for those who are least, those whom society discards is a priority that Christ's followers are called to pursue, so as not to impugn the Church's credibility but to give real hope to many of our vulnerable brothers and sisters."

The Roman Catholic Church and its 1.3 billion adherents are nothing if not diverse, especially on the issue of poverty and its range of drivers and solutions. Politically, socially, and economically, Catholics occupy every available ideology, wealth bracket, and social niche on the planet. And the church of Rome somehow manages to shelter beneath its broad umbrella the whole gamut: from wealthy elites to activists of liberation theology, from the voices of conservative pundits to the prophets of the "preferential option for the poor" and Catholic social thinking. But the current Pope is unshakable in his resolve to reinvigorate those biblical and foundational practices of the faithful which will crush local and global poverty, and expose those he described as "the arrogant and ungodly" who hound the poor and leave them "harassed and exploited."

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Francis' 2019 message for World Day of the Poor incorporates the solemn tones of a pope with the hard edge of difficult scriptures. A few lessons from the Pope:

- ⇒ "The hope of the poor will not perish for ever" (Psalm 9:18). The Psalmist invokes God's judgement of the oppressors who crush the hope of the poor, the ungodly who drive disparity, and the planet's privileged who endlessly accumulate, "as if history has taught us nothing."
- ⇒ The rich "lie in wait that they may seize the poor... and drag them off in their net" (Psalm 10:9). We have invented many new forms of bondage to enslave the poor: migration forced upon the refugees of war and climate change, corporations skipping town, unemployment for millions of young graduates, homelessness for the working poor, trafficking and violence for the exploited, even city architecture devised to disappear the vulnerable.
- ⇒ The poor have a special relationship of trust in the Lord, who acts for their liberation: God hears, comes to their aid, protects, defends, rescues, saves, renders justice, does not forget. The "day of the Lord" erupts in solidarity with the poor (Amos 5:18; Isaiah 2-5; Joel 1-3).

The Pope articulates the paradox of the Homeless Jesus and the poor, as a cord richly interwoven into the fabric of the "now-not-yet" reign of God.

Some cold winter evening, go have a sit with the Homeless Jesus. And listen for the voice of Francis.

ABOUT

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From the Registrar



Key Academic Dates for Fall/Winter 2019-20 are posted at <https://www.tst.edu/academic/key-academic-dates>. A few up-coming dates to take note of:

Now to Jan 20: Opt-out portal open on ACORN for Winter non-compulsory incidental fees (conjoint degree students only). See [UofT Non-Academic Incidental Fees](#).

Nov 29: Last day to submit doctoral theses for examination for Spring Convocation

Dec 6: Last day to submit theses to TST for examination to avoid tuition fees for Winter 2020 (ThD, non-conjoint PhD, DMin, ThM and non-conjoint MA only)

Dec 6: Registration deadline for Winter 2020 (minimum payment must be received by this date; please consult your College Registrar for details)

Questions? Ask Student Services

Upcoming Events



INAUGURAL LECTURE WITH DR. STEPHEN CHESTER—READING JAMES: LUTHER'S EPISTLE OF STRAW AND CONTEMPORARY CANONICAL INTERPRETATION OF THE CATHOLIC EPISTLES

Wednesday, Nov 27, reception at 2:00 p.m. followed by lecture in Leonard Hall

Martin Luther notoriously labelled the biblical book of James as "the epistle of straw." Dr Chester's lecture will explore Luther's position and the often-misunderstood rationale that lay behind his treatment of James. Luther's views will then be brought into dialogue with those of recent canonical interpreters of James in order to ask how we might appropriately approach the interpretation of James and the other Catholic Epistles today. For more information, contact Karen Baker-Bigauskas at 416-946-3521 or kbaker@wycliffe.utoronto.ca.



THEOLOGY PUB WITH BRUXY CAVEY & EPHRAIM RADNER

Friday, Nov 29, 5:15 p.m. Wycliffe College in Sheraton Hall

Join Bruxy Cavey and Ephraim Radner at this month's Theology Pub as they explore Open Theism and issues like whether God knows the future, the nature of free will, and more. To help get the conversation started, we will show the movie *The Adjustment Bureau*. Everyone is invited, and there will be popcorn!



VOICES OF ADVENT: DEVOTION, REPENTANCE, AND PROPHETIC ZEAL

Wednesday, December 4, 11, 18, starting at 6:00 p.m. at St. James Cathedral

Especially for the Advent season: Wycliffe Professor of Old Testament, **Marion Taylor** will be speaking at Toronto's Cathedral Church of St. James for a three-week series looking at nineteenth-century Christians whose writings focus on themes of devotion, repentance, and social justice. For more information: <http://stjamescathedral.ca/voices-of-advent/>

Library Drop-in Sessions This Month

Tues. Nov. 26 : 2:00—2:30 p.m.—Finding the books you need / 2:30—3:00 p.m.—Finding articles in theology

Wed. Nov. 27: 10:00—10:30 a.m.—Finding the books you need / 11:30—12 noon—Finding articles in theology

Thurs. Nov. 28: 12 noon—12:30 p.m.—Resources for Biblical Studies / 12:30—1:00 p.m.—Compiling bibliographies

Location: Graham Library Classroom—No sign-up necessary. Just drop-in. Can't make it? No problem—just email Tom Power, Theology Librarian: Thomas.power@utoronto.ca or drop by the Graham Library.