

Wealth, Poverty, and Practice: Class Matters in Religion and Theology

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ABSTRACT

Poverty is often addressed in religious discourse and by religious communities. Wealth is less frequently the subject of discussion. Almost completely absent are conversations on the relationship of wealth and poverty. What is missing here is any awareness of how the production of poverty and the production of wealth might be related. Also missing is a sense of the practical consequences of such relationships and what to do with them. In this context, some reflections on the topic of class can help to broaden our horizons in various ways, leading to fresh insights into religion and theology, as well as guiding the way to alternative practical responses.

INTRODUCTION

Poverty is often addressed in religious discourse and by religious communities. Wealth is less frequently the subject of discussion. Almost completely absent are conversations on the relationship of wealth and poverty. This situation has practical consequences, as poverty is usually addressed independently of the question of wealth. Projects that address poverty without consideration of wealth range from soup kitchens to homeless shelters to efforts to “level the playing field” for the economically disadvantaged. When wealth comes into play, projects range from almsgiving, philanthropy, and charity to moral exhortations to share some of one’s wealth with those “less fortunate.” What is missing here is any awareness of how the production of poverty and the production of wealth might be related, and of the practical consequences of such relationships and what to do with them. In this context, some reflections on the topic of class can help to broaden our horizons in various ways, leading to fresh insights into religion and theology, as well as guiding the way to alternative practical responses.

CLASS MATTERS

In the United States, the most common discourses regarding class are focusing on income levels, a move that conceals class relationships because each class can be considered on its own terms, and sociologists who follow this model end up with growing lists of unrelated classes.¹ By contrast, considering class as a relational matter opens new perspectives. Rather than studying each class in itself as isolated strata, this allows us to investigate how classes shape up in relation to each other with an eye to the question of how economics, religion, theology, and class are related in the formation and maintenance of class structures.

Insights into the relational character of classes are not new: Greek and Medieval philosophers, as well as the Hebrew prophets, were aware that the classes of their times were related. Even the fathers of capitalism in the eighteenth century, like Adam Smith and David Ricardo, had a sense of the relationality of the classes.²

In thinking about class in relational categories, we cannot avoid matters of conflict and of power. In a context where conflict is frequently considered everybody's fault (variously described as "bickering" or as a lack of effort by all involved parties to get along), we might do well to examine conflict in terms of imbalances of power and who is gaining and who is losing. In the current situation conflict is not simply rooted in occasional competition among different social groups but in the structures of capitalism itself, as not only Karl Marx but also theologians like Karl Barth understood quite well. These structures have to do with the appropriation of wealth by a few at the expense of the majority of the population whose working conditions are deteriorating, which in the current neoliberal economic situation has produced tremendous and ever-growing inequalities not only in terms of money but also in terms of power.³

To be sure, the claim that the production of enormous wealth is related to the production of inequality and lack of resources is routinely contested, but there is plenty of evidence that supports it. The six heirs of Sam Walton, for instance, majority stockholders of the Walmart corporation, control as much wealth as 40 percent of all Americans,⁴ while many of their workers are having trouble making ends meet not only because of low wages but also because they are frequently prevented from working full time so that Walmart will not have to provide benefits that are due to full-time employees.

Furthermore, in the contemporary academy, talk about tensions and conflicts is often rejected in favor of more general notions like otherness and difference. Dualisms and binaries tend to be frowned upon as well, yet concepts such as nonduality, the free flow of difference, and diversity are not easily matched with situations of abrupt confrontations and conflicts. It should be noted that the existence of tensions and conflicts like the ones that manifest themselves in class struggle are contested precisely at a time when the gap between the extremes—expressed at times in the concepts of "wealth" and "poverty"—keeps growing.

Tensions and conflicts are also contested at times by the assumption of a middle, which is manifested in the idea of a middle class. Although some in the middle class still feel safe and assume positions of balance and neutrality, the traditional safety nets that once upon a time created the middle class, like pension and retirement plans, savings accounts, secure jobs, benefits, and the value of educational achievements such as college degrees are vanishing. The middle class is under attack, no longer able to assume that the next generation will be better off or even be able to assume the same standards, and no longer able to trust that the older generations will be able to enjoy a relatively trouble-free retirement. This leaves us with the question

not only of whether class struggle might be real after all but whether the middle is ultimately an illusion and whether it might, thus, be inevitable to take sides. The Occupy Wall Street movement was certainly on to something when it drew a line between the 1 percent and the 99 percent.

RELIGION, THEOLOGY, AND CLASS

If fresh investigations of class as a relationship throw new light on wealth and poverty and what to do about it, investigations that bring together religion, theology, and class have the potential to deepen our understanding further. While in the United States class is often hidden and invisible, connections between religion, theology, and class are more hidden and invisible yet. Religion and theology are abundantly studied, but often as isolated phenomena. To be sure, such compartmentalization lightens the workload of scholars and, on the surface, adds value and importance to contested fields like religion and theology. Theologians in particular may feel they gain precision and control in this way.

However, since no religion is practiced in a vacuum and pure religion is hard to imagine, the question is not whether but how religion shapes up in relation to other expressions of life. The study of religion and theology will need to find a way to take this question into account. Class plays an important role in this regard, as it shapes our lives to the core, often without anyone noticing.⁵ This does not mean that there is a deterministic relationship or a one-way street between class, religion, and theology. Religion and theology are not only shaped by matters of class but also shape them in turn.

This implies a revision of the concepts of religion and theology that might be considered part of a practical response to matters of wealth and poverty. If religions and theologies never deal with matters that are separate from other expressions of life, like political or economic ones, they cannot be defined in general terms once and for all but need to be studied in particular historical contexts, in consideration not only of individual expressions but of broader relationships and—this is still mostly overlooked—the flow of power. In addition, this definition puts to rest a definition of religion as a matter of ideas.

What is at stake can be exemplified in terms of theological reflection on Christian images of God. Traditional theological notions of God as king, for instance, need to be understood not as universal concepts but in the context of the historical circumstances in which they were developed and maintained. From the very beginning, Christian images of God's power were shaped in the context of the Roman Empire. Often, these images resembled the image of the Roman emperor and his power, especially after Emperor Constantine declared Christianity to be the predominant religion of the Roman Empire. Consequently, many theological notions of God as king were informed by the power of the upper class, taking the side of wealthy over against the side of the poor.

Only when this perspective is recognized can we begin a search for alternative theological images of God's power, which took shape at the same time, and their significance. The problem with the failure to investigate the flow of power is that mainline theology for the longest time neglected the fact that alternative notions of God as king existed, which envisioned God's power not in terms of the empire but in terms of revolutionary movements inspired by Christ and his disciples.

This example from historical theology illustrates the significance of studying religion and theology as

expressed in the tensions between wealth and poverty. When contemporary Christians talk about God's power, for instance, they often take for granted that this power is defined in terms of the power of the CEO of a successful corporation. In this case, it might appear as if there are only two options—either endorsing this kind of God or rejecting the idea of a God altogether.

Yet what if God's power were not defined in terms of the ruling class but of the working class? This question is not as odd as it may sound, as God in the biblical traditions is often described as a worker: in the second creation account in Genesis 2:4–25, God crafts the human being out of clay and plants a garden. In the creation stories of the Psalms, God's labor is celebrated (Psalm 8:3 describes the heavens as the work of God's fingers, in Psalm 65:9, God is said to water the earth, etc.). And in the first creation account in Genesis God is said to establish what in capitalist societies was established only by unionized workers: a day of rest after several days of work—that is, the weekend.⁶

In sum, focusing on religion and theology in terms of alternative class positions and thus alternative flows of power (it is interesting that the middle class does not seem to be as relevant to defining God, another indication of its shaky status) will bring to the surface unconscious assumptions and broaden our horizons as we address matters of wealth and power.

TENSIONS

The social phenomenon that makes the topic of religion, theology, and class particularly relevant is a growing polarization between the classes. This polarization has grave implications not only for the working class but also for the middle class, as large numbers face uncertain futures as the nature of jobs are changing and benefits continue to be cut back. Even most middle class jobs no longer provide the stability that previous generations enjoyed. In addition, a glance at the very bottom of the system shows how class turns into a literal struggle of life and death. In the United States, in 2015 12.7 percent of American households were not able to buy enough food. The US Department of Agriculture is aware of these households and calls them “food insecure.”⁷ Moreover, in a city like Dallas, a full 39 percent of inhabitants were considered to be financially insecure in 2012.⁸ The numbers globally are even more dismal. At the same time, it is important to keep in mind that there is a class whose fortunes are increasing, not only in the United States but globally. In the United States, the incomes of the proverbial 1 percent gained 37 percent between 2009 and 2015, while incomes for the bottom 99 percent only gained 7.6 percent in the same time period.⁹

In the United States, such a severe polarization between the classes has not been seen since the Great Depression. It is considerably greater than class polarization in the Roman Empire: In Ancient Rome, the top 1 percent controlled 16 percent of society's wealth, compared to 40 percent in the contemporary United States.¹⁰ Ironically, while many believe that class is less a hurdle in the United States than elsewhere, past or present, the opposite is the case. The option to move up the ladder—the so-called American dream—is rarely an option, although many people hold on to it. In these matters, the United States ranks behind England, hardly a country known for its reputation of social mobility.¹¹

Although most Americans tend to think of themselves as middle class, the majority of Americans belong to the working class, if class is defined not in terms of income levels but in terms of the power people

have at work and over their lives. According to economist Michael Zweig, 63 percent belong to the working class, 35 percent to the middle class, and only 2 percent belong to the ruling class, which is in a position to call the shots and thus benefits the most from the existing class structures.¹² As sociologist Alejandro Portes has pointed out, all but those 2 percent “must work for a living, and this common trait makes [them] share a basic subordinate position.”¹³ Due to its structural lack of power, which continues to grow as the ruling class consolidates its power and wealth, the middle class has more affinities with the working class than it commonly realizes. As noted above, even those who consider themselves middle class have experienced an erosion of their personal finances, their social capital, and their cultural capital. In other words, there does not seem to exist a neutral position in the middle between wealth and poverty.

Due to the relational character of class we need to pay particular attention to the matter of power. As history has shown repeatedly, in situations of grave power differentials, attempts to stay neutral often meant siding with the powers that be. The history of the study and practice of religion and theology in Nazi Germany is one example among many others for how attempts to stay neutral meant to support the status quo. If sides are not taken consciously, they are taken unconsciously, often without awareness of what is really going on. Nevertheless, this taking of sides should not be understood as a mere reinforcement of existing biases and preferences; rather, it is the result of a critical study of the relationships of class, the flows of power, and our own place within them. In the tension between wealth and poverty this means that all, particularly those who are considered to be in the middle, need to take into account their own conflictual locations.

ALTERNATIVES AND PRACTICAL CONSEQUENCES

An analysis of religion, theology, and class that deals with relationship and tension and that acknowledges bias and social location pushes beyond gaining knowledge and understanding to practical consequences. If efforts to investigate and understand particular situations are not to become tacit endorsements, an awareness of alternatives is required. Rather than assuming that the way in which religion, theology, and class shape up at present is “the way things are”—God-given, supported by nature, or simply by historical accident—we need to consider alternative ways in which religion, theology, and class function. We do not assume that the famous saying by Jesus that “you always have the poor with you” (Mark 14:7) endorses a static view of class. For good reasons, as economist Erik Olin Wright has noted, the most controversial question asked by social theorists is: “What sorts of transformations are needed to eliminate economic oppression and exploitation within capitalist societies?”¹⁴

These alternatives are not rooted in wishful thinking or utopian ideas but in observations of alternative ways in which religion, theology, and class shape up. Alternative ways are often overlooked, either because the focus of scholarship is on dominant ideas or, the latter being equally problematic, because the relationship between classes is overlooked, so that minority positions are considered as mere niche-phenomena that do not need to be taken seriously in their potential to contest dominant positions. One advantage of understanding class as relational is that dominant and subordinate positions always have to be understood in relation to each other, and that the dominant class always needs the subordinate class, which accounts

for some of the power of the subordinate class. As Erik Olin Wright has pointed out, this is a different sort of relationship than others in the past. The colonialists' claim that "the only good Indian is a dead Indian," for example, cannot be applied to workers in capitalism, as the statement "the only good worker is a dead worker" does not make sense.¹⁵

An understanding of class in terms of tension and struggle can help us understand the production of alternatives. Examining the flow of power in this regard leads to an understanding that power does not always flow from the top down—from wealth to poverty, for example—but that alternative forms of power emerge from below and from elsewhere. The study of class not only requires an account of domination but also of resistance, rooted in the agency that emerges from those involved in the class struggle.¹⁶

This brings us to a topic that is perhaps more neglected than any other in contemporary discussions of class. Even those who focus on class as a relational category and who understand the conflictual nature of class frequently focus on distribution rather than production. To be sure, both notions, distribution and production, are needed in order to move beyond the common obsession with consumption, which tends to cover up relationships between classes. The focus on consumption not only covers up class relations—more people have refrigerators and color TVs than ever before, it is often pointed out—it also makes it look as if things are going fairly well and as if life is constantly improving even for those on the bottom. Not surprisingly, opponents of class analysis commonly claim the "centrality of consumption," and a "growing level of affluence."¹⁷

Yet even when people move beyond consideration of consumption, they rarely move beyond consideration of distribution. Clearly, distribution of resources is important in the tension between the classes, as some have and, therefore, keep getting more than others. But what is distributed in a capitalist economy is a surplus that had to be produced first. What distinguishes workers from other people in this regard is that they belong to the class that is at the heart of production. CEOs and managers can work all day and night, but they will not produce anything without the labor of workers. A focus on production allows us to take into account what contributions the various classes make to the common good through their agency and their labor, and how these productive contributions are valued by society. To be sure, even those considered "poor" in popular discourse are making contributions, as most people who fall below the poverty line in the United States are not unemployed or idle but are working low-wage jobs, often more than one at a time.

When we talk about alternatives, taking production into account as relevant to class and relationship between classes allows us to consider the contributions of the various classes as well as the role that religion and theology play in valuing these contributions.¹⁸ On the one hand, this will require investigations of what role religion and theology play in upholding the current status quo that values elite leadership and an increasingly unequal distribution of wealth; it is not surprising that much religious discourse these days is about leadership. On the other hand, this will also require religion and theology to help us develop fresh investigations of the differences which those classes can make that are usually considered as subordinated or oppressed. Factory workers, for instance, by having to collaborate and share time on the factory floor, can produce alternative forms of solidarity and resistance that relate to certain religious commitments and are strengthened by them.¹⁹ Even those who traditionally consider themselves middle class have some

options—office workers who work in communal settings and those who produce ideas in conversation with others for instance—also have opportunities to become productive and creative in alternative ways. Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri clarify that “labor cannot be limited to waged labor but must refer to human creative capacities in all their generality. The poor [...] are thus not excluded from this conception of class but central to it.”²⁰ The focus on production creates, thus, a broader horizon for the investigation of religion and class that throws new light on how to respond to the growing gaps between wealth and poverty.

OVERCOMING SOME ROADBLOCKS

Over several decades, many progressive religious communities in the United States have developed concerns for issues of gender, race, ethnicity, and more recently sexuality. While poverty is also a concern for religious communities, the matter is rarely examined in relation to wealth and thus typically pursued as a matter of aid for the less fortunate rather than an agenda for resistance and liberation. When class is mentioned in this context, the focus on gender, race, ethnicity, and sexuality often tends to determine how progressive religion and theology deals with the topic, and this has created substantial confusion. Examining this confusion can help us to develop a clearer sense of the particular role that class plays in religion and theology, while gaining greater clarity for the connection of class with issues of gender, race, ethnicity, and sexuality.

One of the biggest hurdles to understanding class—and by extension matters of wealth and poverty—is a concern for inclusion that is often found in progressive religion, which is at times supported by portraying the divine as inclusive of all humanity. However, while inclusion is a common way to address matters of gender, race, ethnicity, and sexuality, it makes little sense when dealing with issues of class. If class is not a matter of God-given diversity or other natural differences between people but produced in a conflictual relationship, whereby the power and success of one class is built on the back of the other, inclusion into an unjust system or “celebrating diversity” would be counterproductive. Inclusion and celebrating diversity in terms of class would make things worse by endorsing differences that are produced and conflictual, and which benefit some more than others.

Differences of class can, therefore, not be endorsed religiously or theologically. This insight raises an interesting question that cannot be further explored at this time: Might this insight help us rethink how we deal with differences of gender, race, ethnicity, and sexuality, and what sense it makes to endorse them religiously and theologically? In any case, an understanding of class and power helps us see that when differences are celebrated and endorsed uncritically, the status quo may win out. In a patriarchal context, for instance, the position of men is not really challenged by adding women and celebrating their supposedly God-given differences, especially when these differences reaffirm old stereotypes about women, and when the stereotypes about men are not called into question.

At the practical level, progressive interfaith coalitions supported by organizations like Interfaith Worker Justice (IWJ) and Clergy and Laity United for Economic Justice (CLUE) are now addressing class issues through the problem of wage theft.²¹ This is, no doubt, an important issue. One theological rationale for these projects is that all religions believe in justice. Projects opposing wage theft appeal to the moral sensitivities of

religious people and foster righteous indignation about an economic practice that is clearly wrong. No one would argue in favor of wage theft, of course, which is commonly experienced by low-income immigrant workers employed in the construction and service industries. At the same time, these projects can easily be used to justify the status quo of dominant forms of religion, theology, and class if people assume that all will be well when wage theft is finally eliminated and when workers are paid what they are promised without taking a deeper look at the relation between workers and their employers within the structures of capitalism. As a result, unless framed carefully, the focus on wage theft can become a hurdle to developing a deeper understanding of religion, theology, and class.

A more reflective approach to this topic would begin with the question of class: What class is most likely to be subject to wage theft? In light of this question, it could be pointed out that wage theft is not a universal problem that affects everybody, and that it is at least indirectly supported by the capitalist class structure as well as by certain religious assumptions (e.g., that lower classes are further away from God and, therefore, matter less—an assumption that is often exacerbated by racism—or that “illegal” immigrants may not be protected by the law). In the United States, this attitude is best represented by the Christian Gospel of Prosperity). If wage theft were approached in this way, commonly accepted forms of religion, theology, and class would be open to question and it would be possible to envision transformation of religion, theology, and class.

Certain efforts to be non-judgmental are another hurdle to dealing with class. As a friend wrote in an e-mail, “You may be aware . . . that progressives have moved away from the use of the term class because the phrase ‘lower class’ is so laden with negative connotations in our society, opting for more emphasis on income levels.” The problem with the discussion of income levels is, as pointed out above, that it ignores the relation between the classes and the concomitant power differentials. Accepting the negative stereotypes of society rather than fighting them, class is defined in terms of a deficit of income. This position allows for the study of inequality (inequality studies is a growing field), but not for the study of class as that which produces inequality,²² and it certainly does not allow for a critique of the ruling class that benefits from it all.

Furthermore, the “lower” class is left to blame itself or to find other channels for venting its anger. No wonder that the role of religion in this context is commonly seen as providing social aid and welfare to those “less fortunate,” with the goal to raise them up to higher levels. No questions are raised as to how religion is part of the problem by endorsing structures by which fortunes are made, and how religion might contribute to alternatives. In this context, theology is condemned to working within the confines of the status quo, even if it may not be actively upholding it.

It is now clearer how a lack of understanding of class that overlooks the relations between classes and class conflict is not only insufficient but also misleading. The biggest problem in this case is that class is ultimately seen as a matter of special interest, rather than an issue that effects the community as a whole and the practice of religion and theology more broadly conceived. When class is understood as stratification according to income levels, it becomes the special interest of those classes that are suffering deficits: i.e., the problem would be poverty, not wealth. When class is understood in terms of social problems like wage theft, it becomes the special interest of those whose wages are stolen. And when class is understood in terms of inclusion, it becomes the special interest of those classes who happen to be excluded.

To be sure, much of religion and theology encourages the classes who consider themselves to be “more fortunate” to lend support and to help—hand in hand with channelling the economic mainline that class does not have to be a zero-sum game—but there is little sense that solidarity between the classes can be anything more than servicing the special interests of the “less fortunate.” This invites not only patronizing attitudes but prevents critical investigations of class and of religion and theology. There are important lessons to be learned here for how we approach gender, race, ethnicity, and sexuality as well.

Surprisingly, in the culture wars between liberals and conservatives, there is little difference in terms of the underlying assumptions about religion, theology, and class. Both understand that there is a problem when people are “less fortunate” and living in poverty, and both seek to help, using the tools of religion and theology. Here is, of course, where they differ, as conservatives deal with the problem through individual improvement and moral exhortations like “show up for work on time, work harder, be more compliant with what is expected of you,” in short: “pull yourself up by your own bootstraps.” Liberals, on the other hand, deal with the problem by developing social programs that are designed to lift people up to the next stratum, like head-start programs, education, and so on. The underlying idea, however, is the same: both liberal and conservative religious communities seek to help integrate people back into a class system that is not questioned as such, just like their religious beliefs are applied but not examined in terms of what they actually accomplish and what images of the divine they propose. Not surprisingly, God often looks very much like the system in which religious communities operate, leaving no room for theological imagination to envision God otherwise.

In this context, Latin American liberation theologies have offered alternatives that have not yet been appreciated in the United States—despite a time when these theologies had high currency—because liberation theologies and classical liberal theologies have often been confused here; in this framework, both are supposedly concerned about matters like “helping” the less fortunate, “empowering” them, “improving” their social standing, and so on. Yet the agenda of liberation theology is different from this classical liberal agenda, as it is concerned with understanding the flows of power (both dominant and alternative) and what accounts for inequality and class struggle, with taking sides with the “least of these” not in terms of endorsing special interest but in terms of a common interest in which both people and the divine share, and with rethinking the role of religion and theology in all of this.

If the Occupy Wall Street movement as it took shape in the United States has understood anything, it is that there is a fundamental tension between the 1 percent and the 99 percent. Here, a broad public understanding of class as a relational matter and in terms of conflict has emerged: there is a tension, usually covered up, between the 1 percent and the 99 percent that cannot be addressed by mantras of inclusiveness, social welfare, or well-meaning suspension of judgment. While awareness of the tension is not the same as a full-fledged analysis of class, this awareness notes one thing that is most lacking in the current context, namely a sense that there is a class that benefits from the current structures, and that not even the middle class is a part of it.²³

Developing an understanding of class at these deeper levels can move us forward in addressing the matter of wealth and poverty from a religious and theological perspective. For too long we have ignored or played down the importance of class and the economic structures of capitalism, as if becoming more spiritual and less materialistic would help.²⁴ Acknowledging the various factors that go into the production

of religion and theology (spiritual, material, and otherwise), helps us to become aware of the alternatives that are produced as religion, theology and class enter into different alliances.

ENDNOTES

1 Richard Breen counts as many as seventeen classes in “Foundations of a Neo-Weberian Class Analysis,” in Erik Olin Wright, ed., *Approaches to Class Analysis* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 43–44; and 43, n. 6. For an example of how the middle class is defined in terms of income levels, see two otherwise very different sources: Special Report, “Bourgeoning Bourgeoisie,” *Economist*, February 12, 2009, http://www.economist.com/node/13063298?story_id=13063298&source=hptextfeature. Accessed October 2, 2016. The concept of stratification has often gotten its authorization from the work of Max Weber, who analysed class in terms of status, which includes income, wealth, occupation, and education. Yet, as Kevin J. Christiano, William H. Swatos, Jr., and Peter Kivisto, *Sociology of Religion: Contemporary Developments*, second edition (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2008), 133, point out, Weber might be understood as complementing and enriching Karl Marx’s tradition at this point, rather than as opposing it. Unfortunately, the concept of stratification has often been used in this latter way. While, for the most part, the lower classes are studied in terms of stratification, there are few analyses of the wealthy.

2 Both Adam Smith and David Ricardo distinguished three classes, based on their source of income through wages, profits, or rent of land; Ricardo added that the interests of these classes were not merely contradictory but irreconcilable. See Chris Lorenz, “Representations of Identity: Ethnicity, Race, Class, Gender and Religion: An Introduction to Conceptual History,” in Stefan Berger and Chris Lorenz, eds., *The Contested Nation: Ethnicity, Class, Religion, and Gender in National Histories* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 47–48.

3 Barth notes the difference between simple forms of competition and the conflict that is built into the labor contracts of capitalism. Karl Barth, *Kirchliche Dogmatik*, vol. III part 4 (Zollikon: Evangelischer Verlag, 1957), 620.

4 Josh Bivens, “Inequality, Exhibit A: Walmart and the Wealth of American Families.” In: Working Economics Blog. *Economic Policy Institute*, July 17, 2012. <http://www.epi.org/blog/inequality-exhibit-wal-mart-wealth-american/> accessed January 6, 2017.

5 Representatives of the New Working Class Studies have pointed out, for instance, that since we spend the largest block of our waking hours at work, we need to study in depth how work shapes our lives as a whole. See, for instance, the essays in John Russo and Sherry Lee Linkon, eds., *New Working Class Studies* (Ithaca: ILR Press, 2005).

6 For a more extended reflection on these theological perspectives see Joerg Rieger and Rosemarie Henkel-Rieger, *Unified We Are a Force: How Faith and Labor Can Overcome America’s Inequalities* (St. Louis, Mo.: Chalice Press, 2016).

7 See, for example, “Household Food Security in the United States in 2015.” <https://www.ers.usda.gov/publications/pub-details/?pubid=79760>. Accessed February 27, 2017.

8 See “Dallas Residents Financial Insecurity Nears 40 Percent.” <http://www.feed3.org/email/022112.html>.

Accessed February 27, 2017.

9 Aimee Pichi, “The Rich Get Richer and the Poor Get...,” *CBS Money Watch*, July 4, 2016, <http://www.cbsnews.com/news/inequality-1-percent-99-percent-income-growth/>. Accessed February 27, 2017.

10 See Jillian Berman, “U.S. Income Inequality Higher than Roman Empire’s Levels: Study,” *Huffington Post*, December 19, 2011, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2011/12/19/us-income-inequality-ancient-rome-levels_n_1158926.html. Accessed October 2, 2016.

11 Journalists Janny Scott and David Leonhardt, “Shadowy Lines That Still Divide,” in Correspondents of the *New York Times*, *Class Matters* (New York: Times Books, 2005), 1–26, give some of the numbers. They report, in 2005, that more people believe in the American dream than ever before, although studies show that social mobility is less and less an option. They quote economist David I. Levine: “Being born in the elite in the U.S. gives you a constellation of privileges that very few people in the world have ever experienced,” while “being born poor in the U.S. gives you disadvantages unlike anything in Western Europe and Japan and Canada” (14).

12 Zweig, *The Working Class Majority: America’s Best Kept Secret*, second edition (Ithaca: ILR Press, 2012), 36.

13 Alejandro Portes, *Economic Sociology: A Systematic Inquiry* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010), 84.

14 Erik Olin Wright, “Conclusion,” in Wright, ed., *Approaches to Class Analysis*, 191.

15 Erik Olin Wright, “Foundations of a Neo-Marxist Class Analysis,” in Wright, ed., *Approaches to Class Analysis*, 24.

16 Ellen Meiksins Wood, *The Retreat from Class: A New “True” Socialism*, revised edition (London: Verso, 1998), 17, analyzes the consequences of a lack of class analysis on the left: “In the end, we are left with little more than the shop-worn vision of the ‘counter-culture,’ bearing witness against the ‘system’ in an enclave of the capitalist wilderness.” Not only is this approach quite vague; it fails to note significant movements of resistance. As Wood notes, “the critical question concerns the source and agency of revolutionary change” (21).

17 Jan Pakulski, “Foundations of a Post-class Analysis,” in Wright, ed., *Approaches to Class Analysis*, 177. Erik Olin Wright, “Foundations of a Neo-Marxist Class Analysis,” in Wright, ed., *Approaches to Class Analysis*, 25–27, describes how the question of class and distribution is deeply rooted in Weberian Class analysis.

18 For a theological argument to pay more attention to production in a context where the central term is distribution, see Joerg Rieger, *No Rising Tide: Theology, Economics, and the Future* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2009), 116–121, and 137–138.

19 For an account of how labor and religion can influence and reinforce each other mutually see Rieger and Henkel-Rieger, *Unified We Are a Force*.

20 Hard and Negri, *Multitude: War and Democracy in the Age of Empire* (New York: Penguin, 2004), 105. The authors note that the term multitude is a class concept (103).

21 See Kim Bobo, *Wage Theft in America: Why Millions of Working Americans Are Not Getting Paid—And What*

We Can Do About It (New York: New Press, 2009).

22 See also the critique that Portes, *Economic Sociology*, 127, offers of the concept of inequality, since it “does not provide sufficient analytic purchase because it does not fully clarify among whom inequality occurs and what are its basic structural causes and effects.”

23 See Joerg Rieger and Kwok Pui-Lan, *Occupy Religion: Theology of the Multitude, Religion in the Modern World* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2012).

24 This is implied by David Brooks, who now blames 1970s materialism and economic determinism; see <http://www.free-eco.org/insights/articles/the-materialist-fallacy.html>. Accessed October 31, 2016. I would contend, however, that the challenge is not to be less materialistic and more spiritual but to focus on material and spiritual realities in new ways.