

Religion, Poverty and Social Justice

Laurie F. Maffly-Kipp, Danforth Center on Religion and Politics
and
Greg Magarian, School of Law

The last decade has seen increasing interest among scholars in the role of religion and religious actors in social- and development-related work. The increasing disparities of wealth distribution in the U.S. have brought home in myriad ways the necessity of addressing problems of poverty and discrimination in interdisciplinary contexts, yet thus far scholars of religious studies have not teamed with researchers in law, social work, education, or public policy to address issues of common concern. Those issues are wide-ranging and urgent; they include class and gender disparities; religious actors as both facilitators and challengers of existing economic and political structures; distrust between religious and secular providers of service; and the role of religious organizations in health care. Some questions that might arise from collaborative conversation include: 1) How can we better understand the narratives about poverty and social justice provided by and in religious world-views; 2) how might religious communities team with other service providers in fruitful ways; 3) can we better understand how religious actors negotiate issues of poverty and social justice in relation to society at large and how they formulate practices that they see fit as instrumental in order to eradicate poverty; and 4) how can we better negotiate the boundaries between what has conventionally been conceived as the secular and the religious to foster common goals?

We propose to host gatherings (preferably cocktail hours, in the hope that this time of day would yield the most participants) for faculty across Washington University in St. Louis on the topic of Religion, Poverty, and Social Justice, in order to gauge the potential for future teaching and research across campus. The recent establishment of the John C. Danforth Center on

Religion and Politics has created a tremendous opportunity to begin to link work in religious studies to scholarship and teaching in other areas, and to draw on the outstanding resources of this University in social work, education, law, and public policy to engage the topic of religion and its shaping power in societies. The themes of poverty and social justice are an especially important place to begin, given the strengths of work already underway at Washington University on development, law and economics, poverty analysis, labor, and socio-economic disparities (among others). Further, the pressing issue of educational access makes this question especially timely for attention in the classroom. The first step in this regard is to find allies and to engage in conversations that can move us toward potential collaborations.

Potential participants:

Lerone Martin, Danforth Center

Darren Dochuk, Danforth Center

Cassie Adcock, History

David Konig, History and Law

Sunita Parikh, Poli Sci

John Bowen, Anthropology

Amanda Moore McBride, Brown School

Michael Sherraden, Brown School

Sheretta Butler-Barnes, Brown School

Bill Tait, Education

John Inazu, Law School

Jeffrey McCune, Comm Studies