

Rise of the Neoliberal Black Church

David G. Latimore*

ABSTRACT

Abstract— This paper makes the case that the deradicalization of African American religious institutions and the significant implications of this deradicalization often has been misdiagnosed through a failure to fully account for the influence of economic ideology on the formation and operation of African American religious institutions. While there has always been an economic critiques offered within historical and theological interrogations of African American religious institutions, those interrogations have most often focused on an examination of the instrumental value of African American religious institutions on economic participation. Research has often challenged whether African American religious institutions have been efficacious in facilitating increasing economic participation within the communities these institutions serve. What this paper offers is a consideration of African American religious institutions as the objects of economic forces and an examination of the endogenous theology of neoliberalism for understanding and responding to the complicity of some Black church in the economic exploitation of African American poor communities.

Keywords: Black Church, neoliberalism, economic oppression

INTRODUCTION

Terminal Prognosis of the Black Churchⁱ

The black church has long been under the critical patient care of black theologians who have advanced an increasingly dire prognosis of the black church's condition as economic and political realities of communities they serve continue to consistently deteriorate.ⁱⁱ Since Dr. Eddie Glaude's declaration ten years ago of the death of the black church, his prophetic proclamation appears more prescient today than ever before.ⁱⁱⁱ Similar to a patient sequestered in an ICU bed from the vicissitudes of life, scholars and activists call attention to the black church's sequestration behind the security of sanctuary walls and its impotence in responding to the demands for justice that, like the blood of Abel, cry out from the ground of marginalized communities that have been the site of economic, political, and physical violence.

The goal of this paper is not to directly challenge this prognosis. When the contemporary instantiation of the black church is contrasted with the historical and theological norms born of the black church's early institutional history,^{iv} the fragile future of the black church is apparent.^v Against the

historical backdrop of the black church's nurturing of communal responses of resistance to the ubiquitous experience of oppression by blacks, we now witness the black church struggling to respond as America's racial, political, and economic fault lines are laid bare. Rather, this paper challenges the diagnosis or causation of the current condition of the black church. An implied presupposition of this paper is that causation, when rightly understood, provides the opportunity for the identification of remedies that might forestall prognosis. The lack of rehabilitation in the black church's condition is the result of the incomplete diagnosis, and by extension remedies, provided for the church's condition. The prognosis of the black church in its death throes, no longer able to retain its sacred place within black communal existence, may be accurate, but it is far from irrevocable. The restoration of the theological and communal importance of the black church rests in a more accurate understanding of the causation of its current condition. The causation offered by Glaude re-contextualized earlier diagnosis offered by scholars such as Gayraud Wilmore.^{vi} Subsequent theological physicians of the black church, driven by various permutations of this same diagnosis, arrived at similar prognoses.^{vii}

What of Causation?

However, before we too quickly take our seats at the black church's homegoing service, it should be noted that these diagnoses of the black church, while not inaccurate, are incomplete. This incompleteness arises from the failure to properly consider the influence of economic ideology on the formation of the black church. Black theology has offered economic critiques, particularly of capitalism's most recent instantiation in neoliberalism.^{viii} However, much of this theological analysis has focused on the black church's instrumental role in advancing or impending economic engagement by its community. This analysis has treated the prevailing economic ideology as a given and the black church as an entity with with only an instrumental relationship to that ideology. The challenge facing black theology is to examine the black church as formed by economic ideology and to interrogate the consequences of economic presuppositions, such as those found in neoliberalism, becoming institutionally and theologically inculcated within the institutional identity and praxes of the black church.^{ix}

Failure to consider neoliberal ideology's formative affect on the black church has also caused black theological scholarship to ignore the complicity of the black church in economic exploitation of the black community. This complicity occurs through the black church's tacit participation in and affirmation of neoliberal ideology. This has resulted in a suppression of the theology of the black church. That theology has been replaced by an economic governing rationality that serves the very forces producing the systemic injustice against which the black church once fought. Diagnosis of the black church's current condition through the lens of neoliberal ideology recognizes the institutional impact of these forces. It also illuminates the ways in which the black church has morphed into a communal affirmer of

economic ideology.^x

Neoliberal Black Church

The black church has experienced the proliferation of economic concepts into its theological self-understanding and praxes. This is evident in the black church's reductive perception of its community as a market to be served or customers to be acquired.^{xi} The underlying economic ideology shaping this misperception of ecclesial identity or purpose, if left uninterrogated, mutates theological commitments, leaving the black church with its normative liberative theological commitments having succumb to their neoliberal counterparts.^{xii}

The result is a complicity in the expansion of and participation in an economic reconfiguration of life that, for communities of the poor, is the equivalent of a communal death sentence. This reconfiguration of human existence such that "economic values are viewed as primary and therefore as properly determinative" of theological praxis and human agency elevates economic existence as the principle hermeneutic of life. The reconfiguration of the governing rationality of the black church gives rise to what I have diagnosed as the ***neoliberal black church***.^{xiii} The language represents the tendency of black church to accept neoliberalism's reduction the value of the lives of the oppressed to their economic value. This is in direct conflict with the theological values once indispensable to the black church and black theology.^{xiv} The result is a death sentence for both the black church and the community it serves.

Neoliberal ideological influence exerts itself on the black church wherever and whenever there is no explicit decision by the church to resist its influence.^{xv} In the absence of an affirmative stance against neoliberalism, the neoliberal black church, perceiving itself as actively engaged in the fight for an equitable distribution of power and resources, in fact, become unwitting co-conspirator in the continuation of practices that objectify and exploit the poor.^{xvi} The promulgation of neoliberalism's ideology, occurring through the black church's uncritical embrace of neoliberalism, results in the unintentional deformation of concepts ubiquitous within black theological discourse such as individuality, freedom, and choice. These concepts take on meanings inherent within neoliberalism while remaining operative within the theology and praxes of the church. This advances the deformation of these theological values and influences the deployment of these values by churches falling under neoliberalism's spell.^{xvii} The supplanting of black theological thought by neoliberalism's ideology as the primary lens through which one sees the world, and thus determines praxes, leads to outcomes conflictual with the theological objectives proper to the norms of black theological thought.

Theological Deformation with the Neoliberal Black Church

Within the neoliberal black church, there is an ideological warping of theological thought and engagement. This occurs under the unrelenting hermeneutic of individualism, disconnected from communal existence,

which reflects the asocial nature of neoliberalism.^{xviii} This facilitates religious rhetoric which reflects theological presuppositions inherent to the black church while re-contextualizing those theological presuppositions in ways that obscure their critical concern for and connection to communal existence with the poor and vulnerable.^{xix}

This warping of black theological thought within the neoliberal black church occurs at a time when the poor of the black community are most in need of the black church's capacity to speak to experiences of trauma (economic and physical) they routinely encounter. The neoliberal black church exists surrounded by the poor who often live within the shadows of its cathedrals. They are unimpressed by the frequency or formality of religious rituals. They exist in the trauma of their impoverishment, sequestered in prisons of economic deprivation, and look upon the black church with concern and consternation, if not outright contempt. Why? Because they wonder,

...If the God so boldly professed is present when congregants lift up their voices; if the God declared listens so attentively to their petitions, why does this God appear so absent from this community? While the black church gathers amidst the residual fragments of broken communities, worshipping in barren fields of economic exploitation, black, and brown, and poor communities cry out, "Where is this God when another young life is taken, or when a child and their family go to bed with hungry bellies, or when men and women, through no fault of their own, fall to sleep with no more than heaven itself as shelter?" As ornate and overflowing black churches offer only worship and celebration, communities of the economically excluded lift up their voices in lament and dismay.

The neoliberal black church fiddles while the cities burn.^{xx}

The historical theological norms of the black church identify with and struggle alongside the oppressed, believing that the Christ proclaimed is found in solidarity with the oppressed. This stands in opposition to neoliberalism's denial of the persistent presence of the poor and its role in sustaining the poverty that entraps these souls. Regrettably, as the ideology of neoliberalism is ingrained into the theology of the black church, the neoliberal black church emerges, advancing an individualistic view of the perversity that is poverty, locating the cause and trauma of poverty "in poor persons themselves (their lack of ability, or lack of effort)."^{xxi} Understood through this lens, the neoliberal black church engages poverty as a problem of people and their practices, leading to theological proclamations addressing the behavior of the poor as if this is the solution to this economic perversity. The focus on the personal behavior of the poor only reinforces the dominant neoliberal ideology at the root of the very problem of poverty to which the black church believes itself to be responding. The theology of the neoliberal black church appears theologically sound even as it embraces the deformative influence of individualism. Fidelity to this theology is no more than a fidelity to the god of the neoliberal marketplace. The

marketplace god provides the lens through which the proclamation and praxes of the neoliberal black church around the issue of poverty are reimagined. Worship of the God of the oppressed (once central to the black church) is relegated to the altar of the unknown God while neoliberalism takes center stage. Operating with this compromised theology leads the neoliberal black church to decisions, seemingly innocuous on their surface, whose underlying economic presuppositions are in tension with the historical theological norms of the black church and the flourishing of its community.^{xxii}

The Danger of Black Church's Embrace of Neoliberalism

While the theological norms of the black church rest on an understanding of God's preferential option for the poor (even when the black church failed to live up to this theological standard), the neoliberal black church, interpreting human and communal existence through neoliberal ideology, focuses on the individual in competition with all others, eroding the connection between the individual and community.^{xxiii} Neoliberalism's commodification of human life harms the construction of individual and institutional identity, the practices which instantiate that identity, and the contextual lens used to evaluate the decisions and practices of the black church, and its congregants. Neoliberal ideology forms perceptions of ecclesial success for the neoliberal black church as measured by organizational structure, revenue generation capacity, products (or commodification of its rituals), and the marketing (or evangelistic) efforts of the black church.^{xxiv} Both the black church and its leadership, under the influence of neoliberal ideology, become codifiers of those economic ideologies that legitimize "certain political interests, and defend dominant power structures" to the detriment of the black church's liberative mission and the life of the community of the black and poor.^{xxv} The influence of neoliberalism mitigates the neoliberal black church's ability to rightly see the issues confronting the poor, to meaningfully advocate on their behalf, or to materially impact the conditions of their oppression.^{xxvi}

In this regard, the neoliberal black church affirms a form of conceptual violence to marginalized communities that is often the prelude to physical violence and renders economic violence already performed normative.^{xxvii} Additionally, the theology of the neoliberal black church renders normative ideas that ultimately erode the human dignity essential to the quest for liberation. More tragically, neoliberal black theology allows oppressive communal powers to remain insensitive to the lived experiences of the poor and marginalized as those experiences contradict neoliberalism's assertion that its rising tides lift all boats. Instead, neoliberal black theology enforces limitations on poor existence beyond the market's prescribed boundaries for the poor.^{xxviii} The marginalized are forced to conform to prescribed notions of their (non)existence, as those notions themselves are taken, not as projections, but as realities of their existence.^{xxix} The failure of the neoliberal black church to assert itself as theological resistor to the encroachments of neoliberalism upon human dignity and flourishing is the real causation

behind the critique offered by Wilmore and Glaude.

Consequence of this diagnosis?

The difference in the diagnostical assertion of this paper relative to that of scholars of the black church is that of the embrace of the ideology of neoliberalism by the black church. The historical theological norms of the black church call for an examination of economic engagement. Instead of being shaped by neoliberalism, the strength of the black church rests in self-interrogation within the context of neoliberalism. Some will argue that the choice presented to the black church is far more complicated than a simple bifurcation of the theological and the economic. The black church has always existed at the intersection of social conditions, including economic reality, and the theological precepts foundational to the black church's self-expression. However, its is an examination of economic ideology and its influence on the self-understanding and practices of the black church that is most needed at this moment.

The failure to account for the competing and growing influence of economic ideology on the neoliberal black church has resulted in an incomplete and inaccurate diagnosis of the black church's history, a misunderstanding of the change witnessed within that institution, and a hastening of the terminal prognosis offered. This failure has limited the ability of theologians of the black church to provide a constructive account of how the black church might reclaim its liberative posture and free itself, and its community, from the clutches of neoliberalism. The importance of addressing the influence of economic ideology on the neoliberal black church and its praxes only increases as one considers the growing need among the church's constituents for a theology that addresses systemic economic oppression, provides guidance regarding economic agency, offers an alternative to the economic reconfiguration of life, and guides the church in responding to the economic challenges facing the black community. Without an economic reassessment, we will witness the realization of the terminal prognosis offered by the physicians of the black church and the continued rise of the neoliberal black church. However, this illness, as pronounced as it is, need not be unto death.¹

* David Latimore serves as the Director of the Betsey Stockton Center for Black Church Studies at Princeton Theological Seminary. Correspondence should be sent to his attention at Betsey Stockton Center of Black Church Studies, Princeton Theological Seminary, 64 Mercer Street, Princeton, NJ 08540. Email: David.latimore@ptsem.edu

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¹ This is another endnote.

REFERENCES

ⁱ For purposes of this discussion, the black church is understood as those institutions that, “emerge from the religious, cultural, and social experiences of black people. With its roots on the continent of Africa and in the Middle Passage, the black church is the institution providing structure and meaning for African people and their descendants in the Americas who struggled to survive the ravages and brutality of slavery and racial oppression.” Floyd-Thomas, Stacey M. *Black Church Studies an Introduction*. Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2007, xxiii.

ⁱⁱ McKinsey & Company. *The economic state of black America: What is and what Could be*. June 2021; Luhby, Tami. “These Charts Show How Economic Progress Has Stalled for Black Americans since the Civil Rights Era.” CNN, July 6, 2020. <https://www.cnn.com/2020/07/05/politics/inequality-black-americans-civil-rights-economic-progress/index.html>.

ⁱⁱⁱ Glaude, Eddie. “The Black Church Is Dead.” *HuffPost*, April 26, 2010. https://www.huffpost.com/entry/the-black-church-is-dead_b_473815.

^{iv} The historical theological norms of the black church promoted active and passive resistance to the persistent and pervasive efforts of whites to denigrate and subjugate the humanity of blacks from the time of slavery until now. Critics of the black church argue that the black church promoted passivity on the part of blacks. (Pinn, Anthony B. *Introducing African American Religion*. London; New York: Routledge, 2013: 55.) However, this conclusion diminishes black religious agency and ignores blacks demonstrated capacity for the recontextualization, reconstruction, and redeployment of theological concepts for the purpose of resisting oppression. (Hopkins, Dwight N. *Down, up, and over: Slave Religion and Black Theology*. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2000.) The black church has always been concerned with the oppressive material realities in which blacks existed. Out of this concern, the black church’s earliest forms of religious expression demonstrated that, even during the early encounters with Christianity “the mindset and philosophical inclinations of the oppressed Christian were diametrically opposed to those of the oppressor.” (Hopkins, *Down, up, and over*, 136)

^v This paper operates within a particular understanding of the history of the black church. (This is different from the history of black religion which must begin with and engagement of religious traditions in Africa.) The pre-history of the black church begins with the earliest recorded religious instruction provided to slaves in 1695 through the British Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts (Woodson, Carter Godwin. *A History of the African American Church*. New York: Diasporic Africa Press, 2013:7) and ends with emergence of the invisible institution. The invisible institution inaugurates the first chapter of the history of the black church and captures the growth of separate black congregations until the Great Migration beginning roughly in 1910 (or with the beginning of War World I in 1914). The Great Migration signals the second chapter in the history of the black church which continues until the return of black veterans from World War II. While often dated at a later period, the return of black veterans who have been exposed to life outside of America, along with the advent of television are two of the true markers of the pre-history of the Civil Rights Movement. This movement marks the beginning of chapter three of the black church’s history and incorporates growing civil resistance which laid the foundation for the more visible acts of resistance found at the height of the Civil Rights Movement. The fourth chapter in the history of the black church is initiated by the emergence of neoliberalism in the 1970’s which profoundly impacts American culture and the black church. This chapter includes the proliferation of the large institutional black church and the migration of the black church in large numbers out of

inner city communities into suburban enclaves. The fifth chapter, currently being written, begins in the 1990's and is shaped by the growing influence of technology and a shift in the understanding of the black church's identity and that of its congregants as examined through the lens of economic and political agency. This chapter may be coming to an end as we enter a period o shaped by the changing political landscape, the after-effects of the pandemic, and the axiological success of the ideology of neoliberalism.

^{vi} Wilmore diagnosed the black church as suffering from deradicalization and the dechristianization of black radicalism. Wilmore, Gayraud S. *Black Religion and Black Radicalism: An Introduction of the Religious History of African Americans*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1998. ix.

^{vii} Some examples of similar diagnoses: Lincoln and Mamiya. *The Black Church in the African American Experience*; B., Du Bois W. E., and Alton B. Pollard. *The Negro Church: Report of a Social Study Made under the Direction of Atlanta University*; Together with the Proceedings of the Eighth Conference for the Study of the Negro Problems, Held at Atlanta University, May 26th, 1903. Eugene, Or.: Cascade Books, 2011; Johnson, Sylvester A. *African American Religions, 1500-2000: Colonialism, Democracy, and Freedom*. Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2015.

^{viii} Marable, Manning. *How Capitalism Underdeveloped Black America: Problems in Race, Political Economy, and Society*. Chicago, IL: Haymarket Books, 2018; Robinson, Cedric J. *Black Marxism: The Making of the Black Radical Tradition*. University of North Carolina Press, 2021; Rupe Simms. "Black Theology, a weapon in the struggle for freedom: a Gramscian analysis." *Race and Society*, Vol. 2, Issue 2, 2000: 165-193. doi.org/10.1016/S1090-9524(00)00014-0.

^{ix} It may strike the ear as strange to speak of economic ideology becoming theologically inculcated within the church. However, this acknowledges that economic ideology, particularly of neoliberalism, operates with its own endogenous theology. Theology, in its broadest understanding, provides an explication of the idea of the divine, humanity, and the nature of the relationship between the two. Neoliberalism also offers a theology in that it provides an understanding of the divine, which its views as the marketplace. It then explicates its understanding of the human agent (the homo oeconomicus) and the relationship between the two. Day, Keri. "Doctrine of God in African American Theology." in Cannon, Katie G. *The Oxford Handbook of African American Theology*. Vol. 1 [edition]. New York: Oxford University Press, 2014:139; Cox, Harvey. *The Market As God*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2016: 33-46; Sung, Jung Mo. *Desire, Market and Religion*. London: SCM Press, 2007.

^x I am reliant on Antonio Gramsci's idea of hegemony which attends to the instrumental value of social institutions for ideological promulgation of dominant group ideology. McNally, Mark, and John Schwarzmantel, eds. *Gramsci and Global Politics: Hegemony and Resistance*. London: Routledge, 2009.

^{xi} Finke, Roger, and Rodney Stark. *The Churching of America, 1776-2005: Winners and Losers in Our Religious Economy*. 2nd ed. New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 2005: 9.

^{xii} Kotsko, Adam. *Neoliberalism's Demons: On the Political Theology of Late Capital*. Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2018: 70-71. "The point for neoliberalism is not to make a model that is more adequate to the real world, but to make the real world more adequate to the model. This is not mere intellectual fantasy, it is a very real political project. Neoliberalism has conquered the commanding heights of global intellectual, political, and economic power, all of which are mobilized to realize the neoliberal project of subjecting the whole world's population to the judgement and morally of capital." This goal is sought by neoliberalism without regard to the consent of the people and simply results from the will of the wealthy. Clarke, Simon. "The Neoliberal Theory of society." in

Alfredo Saad-Filho and Deborah Johnston. *Neoliberalism: A Critical Reader*. London; Ann Arbor, MI: Pluto Press, 2005: 58.

^{xiii} One of the distinctive features of the neoliberal black church is that they mirror neoliberalism's emphasis on the individual and interpret their theology through the lens of the individualism. The individual serves as the object of theological practice without regard to the individual's connection to the broader community or concern for individuals most vulnerable to systemic disparities.

^{xiv} Quote by Cobb as found in: Rieger, Joerg. *Liberating the Future: God, Mammon, and Theology*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1998: 32. The growing influence of economic ideology on the praxes and proclamations of the church is referred to as economism. This term was used by political scientists to describe what they perceived as the violation of the "political sphere's privileged presumption of autonomy" by economic considerations as those considerations became more important." This term is utilized within this project to reference the phenomenon of the undue influence of economic ideology on the neoliberal black church, and the increasing use of economic measures of success to informed the self-understanding and praxes of the neoliberal black church. Economism results in the elevation of self-interest and individualism (as the neoliberal black church views itself as an economic agent) as the governing criteria for the church. It encourages the trend towards the privatization of religious experience to the detriment of the community, and cultivates an entrepreneurial spirit within its corporate operation and leadership as models to emulate. Ashley, Richard K. "Three Modes of Economism." *International Studies Quarterly* 27, no. 4 (1983): 463-96; Harvey, David. *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*. Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2007: 13.

¹⁵ The ideology of neoliberalism offers reconstructions of ideas fundamental to human existence such as that of the individual, freedom, and satisfaction. Individuals or institutions need not explicitly embrace neoliberalism to be influenced by its constructions of these ideas. An example of this, as related to the church, is found within "prosperity preaching". A central animating idea of this homiletical approach is a construction of God as myopically focused on the satiation of individual desires. This theological construction of God borrows heavily from neoliberalism but proponents of this homiletical and theological approach are not always aware of the ideological source animating their proclamation.

^{xvi} In this regard, the neoliberal black church mirrors a theological deficiency found in the efforts of eighth-century Israel as they engage in a restoration of the temple and its practice ignoring the legitimization of "the institutionalized [and economic] injustice embodied in the temple-state." Horsley, Richard. "You Shall Not Bow down and Serve Them: Economic Justice in the Bible." *Interpretation: A Journal of Bible and Theology* 69, no. 4 (2015): 415–31. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0020964315592137>.

^{xvii} These neoliberal black churches in turn extend neoliberalism's ideology beyond economic life to every aspect of human existence. This is not designed to suggest that there exists a necessarily adversarial relationship between economic and theological thought. Theology, when rightly understood, has always included consideration of economic life. Just a few of the many works that have addressed economic concerns as a function of religious or theological study are: Meeks, M. Douglas. "Economics in Christian Scriptures". Essay in Oslington, Paul. *The Oxford Handbook of Christianity and Economics*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2014: 3; Almodovar, Antonio and Pedro Teixeira. "The Ascent and Decline of Catholic Economic Thought 1830-1950's." in *Keeping Faith, Losing Faith: Religious Belief and Political Economy*. Bateman, Bradley W., and H. Spencer Banzhaf (eds.). Durham: Duke University Press, 2008; Novak, Michael. *The Catholic Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*. New York: Toronto: New York, 1993; Müller, Andreas. *Global Capitalism, Liberation Theology, and the Social Sciences: An Analysis of the Contradictions of Modernity At the Turn of the Millennium*. Huntington,

N.Y: Nova Science Publishers, 2000; Rieger, Joerg. *Remember the Poor: The Challenge to Theology in the Twenty-first Century*. Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 1998.

^{xviii} There are many examples of the asocial presuppositions of neoliberalism that vary based on the field of inquiry. Some examples are: Jo, Tae-Hee. "Neoliberalism as an Asocial Ideology and Strategy in Education." *Forum for Social Economics* 35, no. 1 (January 2005): 37–58; Mark G. Nixon. "Satisfaction for Whom? Freedom for What? Theology and the Economic Theory of the Consumer." *Journal of Business Ethics* 70, no. 1 (2007); Urbinati, Nadi and Martin Thom. "Economic Individualism." in *The Tyranny of the Moderns*, 88-108. New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 2015. It must also be noted that ideas of individualism, while emphasizing the connection of the individual to a social system, have been used by neoliberalism "as a form of social cement, unifying a society under the hegemony of a dominant class." Abercrombie, Nicholas, Stephen Hill, and Bryan S. Turner. *Sovereign Individuals of Capitalism*. New York, NY: Routledge, 1986: 32. Blank, Rebecca M, and William McGurn. *Is the Market Moral? A Dialogue on Religion, Economics, and Justice*. Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 2004: 23.

^{xix} Blank. *Is the Market Moral? A Dialogue on Religion, Economics, and Justice*.

^{xx} Except from a sermon by Latimore, David. *Worship at the Cross*. Joliet, IL, Mt. Zion Baptist Church, September 7, 2014.

^{xxi} Hunt, Matthew O. "Religion, Race/Ethnicity, and Beliefs about Poverty." *Social Science Quarterly*, 83, no. 3, 2002: 812.

^{xxii} Joerg Rieger. *Jesus vs. Caesar: For People Tired of Serving the Wrong God*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2018.

^{xxiii} Blank, *Is the Market Moral?*, 21-22. This posture manifests itself when a religious institutions privilege actions which minimize personal inconvenience or deprivation. This is a presupposition often undergirding approaches to charitable activity where there is an avoidance of actions costly to the institution or individual even when those actions aligned with the proclaimed mission of the ministry.

^{xxiv} Finke, Roger, and Rodney Stark. *The Churching of America, 1776-2005: Winners and Losers in Our Religious Economy*. 2nd ed. New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 2005: 9.

^{xxv} This idea emerges within Harvey's writings, and while not directed in its application to the black church is nonetheless efficacious. Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*. 11.

^{xxvi} It is true that neoliberalism advances the idea of charity as one way of responding to the needs of the poor. It can be argued that neoliberalism is consistent with, and encourages, the church's charitable activity. However, one of the critiques of the concept of charity that emerges in neoliberalism is that, as Alan Gewirth argues in *The Community of Rights*, even the charitable efforts are driven by market motivations and as such become an unreliable source to address the needs of the vulnerable and marginalized. The challenge of neoliberalism is that it offers the replacement of theological motivations with market motivations and potentially robs the church of consistency in its efforts. Gewirth, Alan. *The Community of Rights*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996.

^{xxvii} Hector, Kevin. *Theology without Metaphysics: God, Language, and the Spirit of Recognition*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2011.

^{xxviii} Soss, Joe, Richard C. Fording, and Sanford Schram. *Disciplining the Poor: Neoliberal Paternalism and the Persistent Power of Race*. Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 2011.

^{xxix} Kevin Hector points out that, "as metaphysics identifies an object's essence with one's ideas about it, it may force the object to fit into one's preconceptions, and this conceptual

violence may give way to other sorts of violence.” What Hector says of this metaphysical reality holds true for economism. Hector, *Theology without Metaphysics*, 11-12.