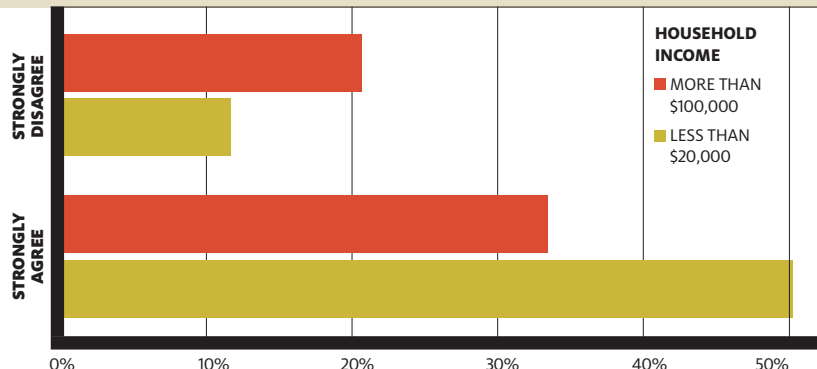


# SPOTLIGHT: Rich God, Poor God

➔ **IT IS HARD FOR A RICH MAN** to enter the kingdom of heaven,” Jesus said. But is it rare for wealthy people to be religious? Recent studies have shown that conservative Protestants in America tend to be poorer (with a median net worth of \$26,200, half the national average) while regular church attendees tend to be wealthier. Now studies are examining religious attitudes and economic inequality. One Baylor University study found that belief in an engaged, personal God varies strongly by income: those who believe God has a plan for them are far more likely to believe that “anything is possible for those who work hard” and to oppose government programs that help the poor.

**Participants who agreed with the statement, “I know God has a plan for me,” by annual household income:**



## Researchers Respond

### ON ECONOMIC RELIGION:

“For many Americans, the invisible hand of Adam Smith has become God’s hand.”

— Paul Froese, Baylor University

### ON POLITICAL RHETORIC:

“Political candidates can promote economic conservatism and a lack of government regulation merely by referring to an engaged God. It works because many rank-and-file voters believe that a lack of government regulation and lower taxes are part of God’s plan.”

— Froese

### DO THE RICH USE RELIGION TO KEEP THE POOR DOWN?

“That’s one interpretation. But religions that thrive in unequal societies are likely ones that appeal to the wealthy—more likely to seek out the rich young ruler, not the widow with only a few copper coins.”

— Tobin Grant, Southern Illinois University

## Is Economic Inequality Good for Religion?

Separate research, published in *Social Science Quarterly*, suggested that America is no religious outlier after all. While it’s exceptional among developed nations, others don’t have as wide a gap between rich and poor. Among nations with similar levels of inequality, such as Bulgaria or Cameroon, the United States is very average. Analyzing historical data, Southern Illinois University researchers argue that economic inequality leads to religiosity rather than the other way around.

