

Interaction Paper

Rynkiewich - Chapter 9 Caste, Class, and Ethnicity

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Caste, Class, and Ethnicity

Thesis Statement

There is no society where everyone is 'absolutely equal' for all have rank and class and each will be more or less egalitarian. Societies are divided into groups that will possess more of or less privileged and or power. Caste, Class, and Ethnicity are only broad categories in how society segregates and ranks themselves, whereby religious-social function – ethnicity is more often stronger than class and has missiological implications.

Summary of Chapter

In Rynkiewich's book "*Soul, Self, and Society*", Chapter 9, *Caste, Class, and Ethnicity* the author provides great detail on the **caste system** in India from the Sanskrit narratives of the four major 'varna' castes (Brahmins, Kshatriyas, Vaishyas, and Shudras). Buddhism rejected the caste system and was not the product of karma; many Hindus sought Buddhism as a way out of the caste system. The arrival and conquests of the Muslims in India presented an opportunity for those most oppressed by the caste system; for others, it was a matter of survival. The **class system** pointed to who controls the resources and production to other cultural and social factors, such as occupation, church, residence, and income, to measure class for groups known by these attributes. However, Paul Hiebert argues, "that class is more about what people think it is (ideology). That is, it gives people a mental picture of the social order. Class does this by ranking groups according to cultural, economic, and lifestyle factors." (Rynkiewich 2011, 162). **Ethnicity**, it was thought in America (land of immigrants), would be diluted like 'soup' in a 'melting pot' and society would become more 'American'. This has NOT been the case. The author concludes with the **missiological implications** where religious-social function, ethnicity is often stronger than class.

Personal Interactions

Personal interaction of **two specific themes** in this reading and other resources:

- (1) **The First Theme – Rynkiewich's Ethnicity statement on "America is a land of immigrants"** made me stop and reflect on how I've been deluded and programmed to believe that America is one big "**Melting Pot**" and that we're all Americans! He states, "It was a popular American theme that there would emerge from these different immigrant groups a **homogenized** national society characterized by a single set of shared cultural values, expectations, and behavior." When in fact, we are NOT soup but rather stew. Yes to some degree 3rd and 4th generations are more "American" but many ethnic groups still live, work, and worship with others like themselves; there's competition between established immigrants and new immigrants; prejudice, and resurgence in ethnicity as a 'response to modernity', and where ethnic identity is *situational* – and depends on whom one is representing oneself.
- (2) **The Second theme, Rynkiewich's Missiological Implications** – caused me to come to terms with the fact that caste, class, and ethnicity does not cover all the categories in how we humans segregate and rank ourselves (and others) in society. He states, "These processes vary in their strength, their relationship to power, and how they structure society... If groups serve political, economic, or identity functions, then they organize and persist." (Rynkiewich 2011, 16) Was saddened by his example in the Church; some are organized and serve by economic class, ethnicity over class, by like-mindedness, or 'insider – just like me'. Truly little diversity – not what Jesus calls His Bride to be...

Two Questions – for Further Engaging this Topic

Note – I'm reading the newly released 8th edition of Robbins' Cultural Anthropology, so the chapter that aligns with Rynkiewicz's chapter 9 is Robbins chapter 4.

First, from Robbins' book, sections 4.2 and 4.3, "Why is social and economic inequality increasing?" This reading made me sick to my stomach because the author lays out with data how the cumulative percent change in real annual wages in the United States by wage group from 1979 to 2017 showed the following: Increased wages for the bottom 80% grew a mere 22%; the top 1% grew 157%, and the top .1 % grew an astonishing 343%! No wonder economic inequality is increasing, and we see more tension and violence in the US – not just race here...

Second, from Robbins' book, I learned that this is beyond individuals being more loving and charitable; there is also a systemic Baalistic economic machine crushing those in poverty. Reference the chart in Robbins page 162; government policy that protects the return rate for investors but harms everyone else. Systems and Policies include: Weakening labor unions, lower taxes on investors, keep inflation low, limit bankruptcy and default, concentrate markets, externalize costs, and privatize services – all to increase the rate of return on investments for the investors!

In conclusion, both these readings widened my perspective on caste, class, and ethnicity by going deeper in global society examples and bringing back to my background and experience in the United States. In particular, 'White Christians' and being complicit on ethnicity and class, the missiological implications leave me saddened and longing for change.

Blessings, Bob Rieger