Introduction

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Religion is one of the strongest and most persistent correlates of social and economic inequalities. Early theorists recognized the importance of the religion–inequality link and introduced important theoretical ideas that continue to guide research in this area (Durkheim [1912] 1954; Sombart 1911; Weber [1905] 1930). Yet, because the religious environment and the processes that underlie inequality in the United States have changed dramatically since Weber and his contemporaries developed their ideas, many current patterns are beyond the scope of these early works. For example, early theorists could not have anticipated the proliferation of Protestant denominations, the changing nature of global Catholicism, the increased presence of other religious traditions, or the growing importance of new immigrant groups with unique religious practices and identities. It has also become evident that the relationship between religion and inequality is no longer a function of large-scale shifts in control over the means of production, but rather reflects changing individual and group approaches to human capital acquisition, family formation and fertility, work and occupational advancement, entrepreneurship, saving, and investing. In the 1960s, researchers revived questions about religion and inequality and began to address the issues that matter for understanding contemporary stratification patterns. Unfortunately, that research lost momentum when debates about socioeconomic status (SES) convergence between mainline Protestants (MPs) and Catholics came to dominate the literature and data and methods were inadequate to adjudicate among competing arguments (Glenn and Hyland 1967; Lenski 1961; Roof and McKinney 1987).

In recent years, the study of religion and inequality has again begun to thrive in part because theoretical and methodological advances have allowed researchers to move beyond issues that stalled earlier work. Theoretical progress in the study of stratification and inequality has provided the foundation for asking relevant questions, and modern data and analysis methods enable researchers to test their ideas in ways that eluded their predecessors. A rapidly growing body of research provides strong evidence that religious

affiliation and beliefs affect educational attainment for adults (Chiswick 1988; Darnell and Sherkat 1997; Lehrer 1999b, 2004b) and adolescents (Muller and Ellison 2001; Regnerus 2000; Sherkat and Darnell 1999), gender roles in the home (Ellison and Bartkowski 2002; Read 2004) and in the labor market (Lehrer 1999a, 2000; Sherkat 2000), fertility and family formation (Glass and Jacobs 2005; Lehrer 1996b, 1996c; McQuillan 2004), wages (Keister 2011; Smith and Faris 2005; Steen 1996; Wilder and Walters 1998), work and occupational outcomes (Sherkat 2012; Smith and Faris 2005), and saving behavior and wealth (Crowe 2008; Keister 2003, 2007, 2011). Moreover, what started as multiple, disparate efforts to understand strong bivariate correlations between varied religious commitments and important indicators of well-being has recently developed into a clear body of evidence in which researchers build on each other's work in increasingly complex and nuanced ways. It has become apparent that most important measures of individual and household well-being have a close connection with religion, suggesting that religion is essential to understanding the causes and consequences of inequality.

Despite the growing quantity and quality of research connecting religion to inequality, no single volume to date brings together key figures to discuss various components of this process. This volume aims to fill this gap with contributions from scholars representing central areas that define the field. The chapters included here were based on papers prepared for and discussed at a conference held at Duke University in September 2012. The conference featured intense discussion of each paper by contributors and a panel of experts on religion, culture, demographic and stratification processes, and social psychology (see the acknowledgments at the end of this chapter for details). Discussions addressed issues specific to each paper, overarching themes in these papers and in the literature more broadly, dialogue among authors whose research generated conflicting answers, and attention to directions that future research might take. Authors revised their work based on feedback from the conference; anonymous authors then reviewed the individual papers, and authors revised their work again based on reviewer comments. Finally, the entire volume was reviewed by another group of external reviewers, and authors had a final opportunity to revise their contributions. The chapters in this volume, therefore, have been vetted multiple times and reflect a collective statement.

These chapters provide important new details about how and why religion and inequality are related by focusing on new indicators of inequality and well-being, combining and studying mediating factors in new and informative ways, focusing on critically important but often understudied groups, and exploring the changing relationship between religion and inequality over time. In this introduction, we first provide an overview of the field and context for the chapters in this volume by summarizing the theoretical approaches typically used in the literature. We identify four common research strategies – demographic, cognitive, social, and power/conflict – and provide a brief overview of how each approach has contributed to understanding the role religion plays in creating

and maintaining inequalities. Although we discuss the various approaches separately, it is important to remember that most research draws simultaneously on multiple explanations either explicitly or implicitly. The bulk of our discussion is on individual and family processes in linking religion and inequality, but we acknowledge the importance of aggregate processes as well, and we briefly address the important work being done at this higher level of aggregation. We then introduce the chapters included in this volume, situating each one in the literature and highlighting its contribution. We conclude with a summary of the boundaries of this volume and some suggestions for future research. Throughout this introduction, we carefully and deliberately discuss associations rather than making overly strong causal arguments. We do this because most research in this volume, and in other research on religion and inequality, cannot yet show definitive causal relations. Although the very strong and very persistent (across data sets and over time) correlations between religion and various measures of well-being suggest causal relationships, we recognize that additional research will need to be done to show causal patterns with more certainty.

DEMOGRAPHIC PROCESSES

Demographic behaviors and processes are perhaps the most commonly used explanations of the relationship between religion and inequality in contemporary research. Much of the research that invokes demographic processes implicitly follows a status attainment model in which ascribed status and intergenerational processes provide a foundation for marriage, fertility, and human capital that interact in complex ways over time to generate adult work, income, wealth, and other outcomes. Because ascribed traits and intergenerational processes are implied or specifically addressed in most research on religion and inequality, we first discuss ascribed states and then discuss how marriage, fertility, and human capital interact with religion and religious beliefs to influence income, work traits, wealth, and other measures of well-being.

Ascribed Status

The traits people are assigned at birth combine to shape the childhood experience and set the stage for later life trajectories. Race, ethnicity, gender, and parents' SES are among the strongest and most persistent determinants of achievement; because parents also typically decide a child's religion and because other ascribed states are highly correlated with religion, childhood religion also plays an important role in attainment. The visible markers of race, ethnicity, and gender create racialized and gendered processes that affect achievement throughout a person's life. Some of this effect is a result of racial and ethnic influences on parents' SES, which parents then transfer to their children in subtle, but very powerful ways. SES structures opportunities, and parents and

others (e.g., teachers) affect perspectives on education and work through the organization of children's activities at home (Lareau 2002, 2003) and in the classroom (Willis 1981). Parents' jobs and their attitudes toward those jobs also convey class-based information to children that has the potential to affect socioeconomic attainment (Kohn 1976; Kohn et al. 2000; Kohn and Slomczynski 2001). Of course, parents' financial situations can place hard constraints on their children's lives as well. For example, neighborhood residence can determine school quality, and parents' financial resources affect their abilities to pay for other education and training. Similarly, parents with saved assets or wealth can transfer those savings directly to their children across the life course. As a result, occupation, earnings, and wealth tend to be very similar across generations, and to the extent to which there was a relationship between religion and inequality in prior generations, there will be a correlation in current generations. For these reasons, race, ethnicity, gender, and family background occupy central positions in research on religion's effect on adult outcomes.

Childhood religion, arguably an ascribed trait, is both substantively and methodologically important in research on religion and inequality for at least three reasons. First, because most Americans remain affiliated with their childhood religion in adulthood, childhood and adult religion are the same for most people (Sherkat 2001, 2010). Second, childhood religion affects many of the mediating processes that affect important adult SES outcomes. For example, childhood religion affects education, age at first marriage, and age at first birth. Each of these is an important indicator of well-being on its own, and each also subsequently affects other outcomes such as employment, occupation, individual and household income, savings, and wealth. Given that the foundations for these mediating processes are established in early adulthood, it is likely that childhood religion is an important measure of religious commitment. Third, using childhood religion to predict adult outcomes ensures that the time order is correct in predicting important measures of well-being. That is, if there is a strong relationship between childhood religion and adult income, net of other processes, researchers can say with confidence that, if the relationship is causal, the effect is religion on income rather than income on religion.

Marriage and Fertility

Indeed, there are very strong associations between religious affiliation and adult family processes, including marriage and fertility. Religion can influence orientations toward the desirability of marriage, the age at which people should first marry, and related decisions about cohabitation (Hammond, Cole, and Beck 1993; Lehrer 2004c, 2008; Mosher, Williams, and Johnson 1992). Decisions about marriage and cohabitation, in turn, are closely linked to orientations and decisions regarding family, education, and work. In relatively conservative religious traditions, women are encouraged to focus on home and family activities, to have large families, and to interact with others who marry early and focus

on home activities. As a result, early marriage may be perceived as both desirable and acceptable in these faiths (Lehrer 2004c). Women who are members of conservative Protestant (CP) denominations also tend to have low education levels, which limits their job prospects and increases the appeal of early marriage and fertility (Hammond, Cole, and Beck 1993; Lehrer 2004c, 2008; Mosher, Williams, and Johnson 1992). In contrast, in more liberal faiths, early marriage and childbearing are not normative; educational and career attainment are encouraged in these groups, making marriage and early fertility less appealing.

Religious affiliation is also associated with the choice of a spouse (Lehrer 1998; Sherkat 2004), marital stability and satisfaction (Lehrer 1996a; Lehrer and Chiswick 1993), and the likelihood of divorce (Call and Heaton 1997; Filsinger and Wilson 1984; Lehrer 2008). The selection of a marriage partner is strongly motivated by homogamy (i.e., marital similarity) on traits such as education, income, and other traits. Religious homogamy is an important predictor of marital stability and satisfaction; conversely, religious heterogamy (when a couple has different religious affiliations) can have an adverse effect on marital solidarity. Couples who share the same religious beliefs can share spiritual experiences, participate jointly in religious observances and activities both at home and in other settings, and develop overlapping social relations originating from religious groups. Religious homogamy also increases the likelihood that couples are similar on many demographic characteristics and values including education, childrearing, the allocation of time, work patterns, decisions about where to live, social relationships, and decisions about finances. In contrast, religious heterogamy and the processes it affects can be destabilizing, and divorce can become more likely (Lehrer 1998, 2004c).

Religious beliefs – separate from the effect of religious homogamy – can also affect the likelihood of divorce. In faiths where divorce is explicitly prohibited, the social costs associated with marital dissolution are high, and the decision to divorce can generate severe social and spiritual consequences. Catholicism, for instance, has a well-known prohibition against divorce. Catholic doctrine regards marriage as a sacrament, and any valid marriage between two baptized Catholics cannot be dissolved (D'Antonio et al. 2007; Tropman 1995, 2002). Catholics point to several biblical passages to support this teaching, including "everyone who divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery, and he who marries a woman divorced from her husband commits adultery" (Luke 16:18, Mark 10:11–12). In the Catholic Church, the only time a couple can remarry after divorce is when an annulment is granted, most often indicating that the two parties did not exchange valid matrimonial consent initially. In the absence of an annulment, a divorced Catholic is not permitted to participate in other church sacraments, making it extremely difficult to be an active member of the Catholic Church. Until relatively recently, divorce was very rare among Catholics, adding social pressure to the spiritual pressure to remain married. Although divorce has increased in recent decades among Catholics, particularly

among white Catholics, the likelihood of divorce is still lower for Catholics than for those from other spiritual traditions with comparable educations, incomes, and other demographic traits (D'Antonio et al. 2001; D'Antonio et al. 2007). Marital conflict can also arise when religious beliefs differ in married couples, particularly when one partner holds more fundamentalist religious commitments than the other (Curtis and Ellison 2002).

Marriage and divorce have very clear effects on wealth attainment and inequality (Keister 2005; Lupton and Smith 2003). Marriage increases earnings (Waite and Lehrer 2003) and wealth (Keister 2005), and it also promotes beneficial wealth-accumulating strategies such as combining assets and using separate assets as joint property (Keister 2005). Couples merge savings and checking accounts and combine investments, they purchase homes rather than rent, and they otherwise consolidate finances into jointly owned property. Marriage allows couples to pool risks (e.g., if one person is unemployed, the other can continue working), creates economies of scale (e.g., in housing costs), and allows people to take advantage of a division of labor (Waite and Lehrer 2003). Marriage also creates common goals (e.g., children and children's educations, home improvements and upgrades, and retirement objectives) that encourage couples to save. Although early marriage is likely to reduce attainment of other outcomes such as education that suggest reduced wealth, early marriage also has the potential to increase saving and lifetime wealth accumulation by increasing the likelihood of early saving and homeownership. By contrast, divorce reduces well-being for both parties and for children by adding costs (e.g., legal fees, fragmentation of health care benefits, costs associated with sustaining two households) and eliminating economies of scale.

Fertility behavior is also an important part of the causal processes linking religion, education, and family processes with inequality. It is well documented that religion influences orientations toward premarital sex and the onset of sexual activity, attitudes regarding birth control and the use of contraception, whether a person or couple has any children, the age at which people have their first child (i.e., age at first birth), family size, and even behaviors such as taking "virginity" pledges (Lehrer 1996a, 2004c; McQuillan 2004; Sherkat and Ellison 1999). Conservative religious groups tend to be more patriarchal and to include social and psychological rewards for having large families. In such pronatalist faiths, both formal rules and less formal norms approve of and even encourage early fertility, and having children can provide considerable social status while childlessness is seen as deviance (Lehrer 2004c; McQuillan 2004). Mormon/LDS fertility rates have been notably high in the United States at least in part in response to such incentives (Lehrer 2004c, 2008; Stark and Finke 2000). The Catholic Church also discourages contraceptive use and abortion, and Catholic family size has historically been large. Yet, fertility rates among white Catholics have declined since the 1960s, in part as a result of declining adherence to church teachings regarding contraception; however, family size remains large among Latino Catholics (Lehrer 2004c; Mosher, Williams, and

Johnson 1992). Most CP groups also maintain a strong pronatalist position, and those who identify with Baptist, Pentecostal, and other conservative groups have high rates of fertility, as do Mormons (Sherkat 2010). In contrast, MPs and Jews (excluding the smaller Orthodox communities) place less emphasis on large families, and fertility rates in these groups declined substantially after the post–World War II baby boom.

Fertility behaviors have important effects on job and career advancement, occupation, education, individual and household income, saving, and wealth. Having children early in life is particularly burdensome because the demands of childbearing and childrearing make it difficult to start or complete schooling, hinder the potential for migration to take advantage of opportunities, make career development more challenging, and can reduce saving and investing, all of which have the effect of inhibiting lifelong asset growth (Keister 2005). Therefore, religiously inspired pronatalism can have a negative effect on status attainment. In contrast, remaining childless is an extremely strong, positive predictor of attainment. Delayed fertility and childlessness increase wealth because they facilitate educational attainment, career development, occupational advancement, and initial saving and investing.

Human Capital

There is an extensive literature documenting the important role that religion plays in the acquisition of human capital, including education and other forms of training and experience, in the United States (Burstein 2007; Darnell and Sherkat 1997; Fitzgerald and Glass 2008; Glass and Jacobs 2005; Lehrer 2004b; Sherkat and Darnell 1999), and human capital is one of the strongest predictors of occupation, income, and wealth accumulation. Educational attainment is particularly high among those raised in Jewish families, and Jews are more likely than members of other faiths to hold an advanced degree beyond a bachelor's degree. MPs also have higher levels of educational attainment than do members of other religious groups, but in the past 30 years white Catholics have equaled MPs in years of education (though they still lag behind in completing advanced degrees) (Keister 2011). A substantial body of research documents the low rates of educational attainment found among CPs (Darnell and Sherkat 1997; Fitzgerald and Glass 2008; Glass and Jacobs 2005; Greeley and Hout 2006; Smith and Faris 2005), though Mormon/LDS respondents have notably higher levels of education, a pattern that sets them apart from other CP groups (Sherkat 2010). Research also shows that the sect-church patterning of educational attainment in Protestant denominations is also evident among African Americans, with conservative groups attaining education at lower rates than MPs (Sherkat 2002, 2010).

Researchers have posed at least three explanations for the effect of religion on education: (1) constraints such as family background in shaping educational decisions and outcomes (Bartkowski and Ellison 1995; Ellison and Sherkat

1995; Finke and Stark 2005; Sherkat and Darnell 1999); (2) religiously influenced demand for education; and (3) macro-level conditions (supply of education) that determine options and vary across religious groups (Lehrer 1999b, 2004b, 2004c). CPs, for example, tend to be skeptical of the approaches taken in secular schools and universities that propagate secular humanist values and promote scientific investigation rather than the acceptance of divine truths (Darnell and Sherkat 1997; Sherkat 2010; Sherkat and Darnell 1999; Sikkink 1999). These unique orientations, in turn, reduce education, particularly completion of higher education, by limiting enrollment and overall years of schooling (Fitzgerald and Glass 2008; Glass and Jacobs 2005; Sherkat and Darnell 1999). In contrast, particular traits have also been cited as significant factors in producing high levels of educational attainment among Jews (Burstein 2007) and Mormons/LDS (Shaefer and Zellner 2007). Burstein (2007) points out that cultural emphasis on pursuits in this life are important contributors to educational success for Jews. Similarly, Shaefer and Zellner (2007) discuss the educational efforts of the Latter-Day Saints, including a system of seminaries and institutes that focus on retaining adolescent members and the important position that higher education, particularly Brigham Young University, plays in producing well-educated, committed LDS adults.

Education improves life chances and financial well-being, and this relationship is well established in the social sciences. Education interacts with other family processes, including marriage and fertility, and this interaction generally leads to behaviors that enhance occupational attainment, earnings, and asset accumulation. Indeed, there is evidence that the timing of life course transitions, including marriage and childbirth, can affect educational attainment in ways that may also affect other measures of attainment. In particular, early family formation may be partially responsible for low educational attainment for CP families, and research on women's educational attainment has shown that early family formation is primarily responsible for the negative impact of being raised in CP groups (Fitzgerald and Glass 2008).

Work, Income, and Occupations

There are also important relationships between religious affiliations, the amount of time spent working, and the nature of the jobs people hold; these occupational outcomes then affect individual and household income, job benefits, and wealth. One of the most pronounced relationships is between religious affiliation and gender differences in work behavior. In particular, women from more conservative religious traditions are less likely to work full time than other women, although men from these groups are as likely as the general population to do so. Gender differences in labor force participation also contributed to upwardly mobility for white Catholics. In the mid-twentieth century, white Catholic women were less likely than others to work full time, but today's white Catholic women are nearly as likely as white Catholic men to engage

in full-time work. This important change increased individual and household income for white Catholics, which translated into growth in homeownership, home values, and total wealth. Jewish women tend to work full time until their children are born; then they are more likely to stay at home while the children are young and return to full-time work after the first few years of the children's lives (Keister 2011).

Recent evidence shows that there are important connections between religious identifications/orientations and occupational and income attainment. For example, CPs have lower occupational prestige scores than members of other religious traditions, and they are less likely to be employed in highly compensated professional occupations, even relative to their low rates of education attainment. In contrast, white Catholics are moving into professional occupations that put them close to parity with MPs, a pattern that would have been unheard of in prior generations. At the other end of the spectrum, Jews and nonreligious people have considerable occupational advantages (Sherkat 2012). Similarly, religion has important effects on income (or flows of funds into the household from wages, salaries, and other sources). Because religion is correlated with family background, adult family processes, human capital, work, and occupation, it is no surprise that many of the same patterns hold in the relationship between religion and income. Conservative Protestants (both white and black) and Latino Catholics tend to have relatively low income and are more likely than others to have been raised in poverty (i.e., to have household income below the poverty line), to be in poverty as adults, to receive government transfer payments, and to experience extended unemployment spells (Keister 2011). In contrast, white Catholics, MPs, and Jews have significant advantages on each of these dimensions (Keister 2011). These findings are consistent across studies (Lehrer 2010; Smith and Faris 2005; Steen 1996), and the stratification ranking of religious groups holds when various individual and family traits are controlled (Lehrer 2010; Steen 1996). Since the early 1980s, other research has provided corroborating evidence for the uniquely high earnings of Jewish individuals (Burstein 2007; Chiswick 1993; Hollinger 2004; Wilder and Walters 1997).

Wealth: Assets and Debts

Wealth ownership is one of the most important components of social and economic stratification, and researchers have shown that wealth inequality is extreme in the United States. Wealth, or net worth, is total household assets less total liabilities. There is significant evidence that all of the demographic (family background, adult family, human capital, work, occupation, and income) processes we have already discussed combine to shape wealth ownership. In addition, religion appears to affect wealth ownership directly. A person's general approach to the world – his or her cultural orientation, including religious beliefs – is an important determinant of wealth. Indeed, the empirical evidence

is quite pronounced. CPs and Latino Catholics have very low levels of total net worth, real assets (e.g., tangible assets such as the home and other real estate), and financial assets (e.g., relatively liquid assets such as stocks, bonds, mutual funds, and bank accounts). They have high levels of asset poverty, are very likely to have zero or negative net worth, and very unlikely to have high net worth. In addition, members of these groups tend to accumulate assets relatively slowly across the entire life course, and they rarely enter high levels of the wealth distribution. There are some exceptions, including second- and third-generation Latinos, who have been more upwardly mobile on many measures of wealth, but otherwise, these patterns are quite strong. In contrast, white Catholics, MPs, and particularly Jews are much more advantaged on each of these measures.

An interesting way to consider wealth accumulation over the life cycle is using accumulation trajectories (i.e., the patterns by which people accumulate assets). One study showed that significantly more of those raised as CPs (13%) and Latino Catholics (14%) accumulated no significant assets of any sort (Keister 2011), whereas only 1% of those who were raised as Jews had no assets. Asset accumulation tends to follow a trajectory of first saving money, purchasing a home, and then perhaps buying a small amount of stocks. Of those raised as MPs, 22% followed this path, as did 23% of white Catholics. Perhaps most instructive are the differences across households in following the trajectory called the early transition to financial assets (i.e., owning stocks and other higher risk assets early in life), which is the most high-risk, high-return trajectory. In the full sample, only 4% of respondents followed this path, but among Jews, 33% took this high-risk, high-return strategy. These results imply that the repertoire of skills and decision-making abilities learned in childhood may set a course of action that ultimately translates into high wealth.

Health and Well-Being

Psychological and physical health are also important measures of well-being that are often considered alongside measures of financial well-being, and there is considerable evidence that religion is associated with both psychological and physical health outcomes. A large body of empirical evidence suggests that religious involvement (e.g., attending religious services and other religious activities) and other forms of religious activity (e.g., prayer and meditation) are positively associated with mental health outcomes (Ellison and Levin 1998; Krause 2010; Levin 1994; Nooney and Woodrum 2002; Smith, McCullough, and Poll 2003). Similarly, there is evidence that religious involvement can improve physical health, as in its positive effects on sexual health, life expectancy, stroke, and heart failure and pulmonary disease (Ellison and Hummer 2010; Ellison et al. 2010; Heaton 2010; Koenig 2007). Recent work provides evidence that religious practices, personal relations with God, and religious-based social support