

# Socioeconomic Inequality in the American Religious System: An Update and Assessment

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*American sociology has long documented and theorized persistent inequalities between religious communities in the United States; in addition, socioeconomic inequalities between religious groups have played an important role in many sociological theories about religion and society. Since the publication of numerous important works published in the mid-20th century, however, the social stratification of American religion has been a curiously understudied topic. This research note is an attempt to update our descriptive knowledge about socioeconomic inequalities between American religious groups. Using General Social Survey data to track educational, income, and job status inequality over a 16-year period, from the early 1980s to the late 1990s, we find that socioeconomic inequality in the American religious system has been quite persistent and stable, suggesting that significant mobility within this system in the mid-20th century may be declining, thus producing a more stable system of stratification.*

American religion has from the beginning of its history been stratified by education, income, and occupational status. Since colonial days, religious differences have played a role in constructing social differentiations that sustained socioeconomic inequalities. As the American religious system grew increasingly pluralistic over time, socioeconomic disparities between different religious communities transformed and persisted.

American sociology has for decades documented and theorized these persistent inequalities between religious communities. Many distinguished works—including H. Richard Niebuhr's *The Social Sources of Denominationalism* (1929), Liston Pope's *Millhands and Preachers* (1942), Gerhard Lenski's *The Religious Factor* (1961), W. Lloyd Warner's *Yankee City* (1963), E. Digby Baltzell's *The Protestant Establishment: Aristocracy and Caste in America* (1964), and N. J. Demerath's *Social Class in American Protestantism* (1965)—have analyzed socioeconomic inequality in American religion (also see Cantril 1943; Lazerwitz 1961; Pope 1948; Schneider 1952). More recently, Finke and Stark (1992), Emerson and Smith (2000), Greeley (1989:76–80), Ammerman (1997), and others have examined various aspects and influences of inequality in American religion.

Socioeconomic inequalities between religious groups have also played an important role in many sociological theories about religion and society. Marx, for example, is famous for theorizing religion's ideological role in legitimating economic inequality and exploitation (Marx 1978a, 1978b [1843, 1845]). Status differences within and between religious groups were important features of Weber's analysis of religion (1978). According to Finke and Stark's (1992) religious economies theory, educational disparities significantly influenced the historical course of religious diffusion in America. Hunter (1983:49–60) theorizes that socioeconomic differences between religious groups explain the persistence of conservative religion in modern society. And Wuthnow (1988) argues that educational mobility was key in the 20th-century restructuring of the American religious system.

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Given both the historical stratification of American religion and its significant role in helping to define and sustain economic and political inequality more broadly (Swartz 1996), one would expect scholars to have paid close attention to tracking socioeconomic differences in the American religious system. But we generally have not. In fact, the last, best, systematic empirical analysis of American religious stratification (Roof and McKinney 1987; for earlier research, see Greeley 1976; Riccio 1979; Roof 1979) was published 18 years ago, and was based on General Social Survey data collected between 1972 and 1982, in comparison to data from the 1940s (note that Kosmin and Lachman's (1993:251–77) interesting analysis, which covers 1989–1990 data, is somewhat similar, but fails to distinguish many conservative vs. mainline Protestant groups, fails to separate out certain black from white Protestant groups, lacks a job prestige measure, employs a religion categorization scheme that mixes up denominations with self-identities, and reports a survey refusal rate but not a true response rate). Although Roof and McKinney's analysis shows striking social class disparities among American religious groups, their larger discussion emphasizes the “fluid and dynamic” changes affecting interreligious inequality during the decades of the mid-20th century (1987:107–17). They point particularly to the upward mobility of Catholics, Mormons, and evangelical and fundamentalist Protestants, concluding that:

The [social] sources of denominationalism identified by [H. Richard] Niebuhr . . . are still important for understanding the social bases of American religion. The nation's faith communities continue to be divided along lines of social class . . . . We should not, however, minimize the changes that have occurred during [the last fifty years]. The religious map of America is much different today from the time when Niebuhr wrote . . . . The ascriptive bases of the religious communities have declined, creating a more fluid and voluntary religious system. (1987:144–45)

These findings, however, are now decades old.

Much more recently, Thaddeus Coreno (2002) and Jerry Park and Samuel Reimer (2002) have published research on religion and socioeconomic inequality. Coreno (2002) finds that white U.S. Protestant mainliners and fundamentalists represent different class cultures, the two groups are significantly separated by social class and status differences. Park and Reimer (2002) note what they see as a “slow convergence” of different religious groups toward more similar social class positions between 1972 and 1998, noting at the same time, however, the major class differences that remain between different faith communities. We are pleased to see new research published on religion and socioeconomic inequality, but believe further study is warranted. For one thing, both of these articles group religious believers by the major tradition categories of fundamentalist, evangelical, mainline, African-American Protestant, etc.—not by the more specific denominational type we use below. Major religious tradition categories are often very useful analytically but can also obscure dynamics that may occur and be evident with more fine-grained groupings. The consequence of the “slow convergence” Park and Reimer observe may also be rather trivial, in view of the large socioeconomic differences that still separate different religious groups and the fact that nearly any observed change over time would almost inevitably be statistically significant given the very large *N*s of their religious categories (e.g., 8,932 evangelical Protestants, 9,502 Catholics). Moreover, neither article reports on changes in the occupational prestige of different religious types over time, which we do below. In sum, we may be seeing early signs of renewed scholarly interest in religion and socioeconomic inequality (also see Keister 2003), but more research is clearly warranted.

This research note is an attempt to update our descriptive knowledge about socioeconomic inequalities among American religious groups. Here we seek to track educational, income, and status stratification in U.S. religion over a 15-year period, from the early 1980s to the late 1990s, in order to assess the extent and structure of social stratification in the American religious system. Our intention is to assess how much, if any, change has taken place, and which religious groups have gained and lost in socioeconomic standing.

## DATA AND METHODS

Data for this analysis comes, as they did for Roof and McKinney (1987), from the General Social Survey, a biennial national survey of U.S. noninstitutionalized adults featuring demographic, socioeconomic, and attitudinal data (Davis, Smith, and Marsden 2001). Our approach in the following analysis is to calculate mean values for religious denominations for four socioeconomic indicators: years of education, college degree, job prestige, and household income. For income, we use the GSS-imputed income measure, "REALINC," which is adjusted to 1986 dollars. Job prestige is measured using the Hodge-Siegel-Rossi prestige rating of U.S. Census occupations. Data from the 1980s use the 1970 occupational codes, and data from the 1990s use the codes from the 1980 census. Because some religious denominations are small, to obtain large enough *Ns* for analysis, we merged the 1983 and 1984 data together and the 1998 and 2000 data together. The correct income variable was unavailable after 1996, so this analysis relies on 1996 data only, rather than 1998 and 2000 data (see <http://www.icpsr.umich.edu/GSS/> for details).

The reader should note that certain groups in particular years reflect low *Ns*, and so any interpretation of data on them must be somewhat circumspect, particularly when findings reflect big changes or when they diverge from what other studies show. However, rather than deleting them from analysis, this article includes some lower *N* cases, with the understanding that readers will use care in interpreting them. In particular, readers should note the *Ns* for Unitarians (eight in 1983/1984) and some other groups which in some years have *Ns* in the teens. Fluctuations in *Ns* across the two time periods may be the result of the geographical-cluster sampling method used by the GSS.

Two comments on religious denominations and groupings. First, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) was formed officially in 1988 out of a merger of several mainline Lutheran bodies, all of which we group together as "ELCA" for our 1983/1984 analyses. Second, we categorized certain religious groups analyzed here (e.g., conservative Methodist, black Baptist, etc.) by grouping close families of churches and denominations that share a similar religious heritage (e.g., Wesleyan, Free Methodist, etc. churches comprising the group "conservative Methodist").

Mean values for each religious denomination or tradition are presented in Tables 1–4 as percentages, ranked by status in 1998–2000. Tables 1–4 include the *Ns* for each combined set of years, mean percentages for 1983/1984 and 1998/2000 (except for Table 3, which uses 1996 data), the percent change for the intervening years, and the change in ranking for each religious denomination. Table 5 then compares the average ranking for the four socioeconomic variables, comparing 1983/1984–1998/2000 (and 1996 for Table 3), in order to assess overall ranking change for the intervening time period. Tables 1–5 group the religious denominations and traditions into three clusters, showing the top third, middle third, and bottom third.

## RESULTS

Table 1 reveals major disparities between American religious traditions in the percent of adherents who have earned college degrees. At the top, more than 60 percent of Unitarian and Jewish Americans, 46 percent of Episcopalians, and nearly 40 percent of Presbyterian Church in the USA (PCUSA) believers in 1998/2000 hold college degrees. By contrast, seven different religious denominations in 1998/2000 had less than 20 percent of members with earned college degrees. Overall, the highest formal education appears associated with more liberal traditions (Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints being one exception), and the lowest with more conservative, sectarian, Pentecostal, and black church groups. Most, but not all, groups increased in percent with college degree, most typically by 4–8 percent when a few low-*N* outliers are excluded. Few groups shifted in ranking by more than a few ranks in the approximately 16 years between 1983/1984 and 1998/2000.

**TABLE 1**  
**PERCENT WITH COLLEGE DEGREE, BY DENOMINATION, 1983–2000 (RANKED BY 1998–2000 STATUS)**

Denomination	N/N (1980s/1990s)	% College		Change in % College	Change in Rank
		1983–1984	1998–2000		
Unitarian	8/18	75.0	61.1	–13.9	0
Jewish	70/113	55.7	60.2	+4.5	0
Episcopal	65/112	50.8	45.5	–5.2	0
Presbyterian USA	134/151	31.3	39.7	+8.4	0
UCC	14/17	21.4	35.3	+13.9	+4
LDS	66/32	19.7	28.1	+8.4	+4
Nonreligious	224/794	25.9	27.1	+1.2	–2
United Methodist	126/374	23.0	27.0	+4.0	–1
Missouri/Wisconsin Lutheran	32/104	9.4	24.0	+14.7	+8
Conservative Methodist	22/25	22.7	24.0	+1.3	0
ELCA	40/148	25.0	23.6	–1.4	–5
American Baptist	16/41	12.5	22.0	+9.5	+3
Catholic	814/1384	14.3	21.7	+7.5	0
Black Baptist	34/136	14.7	19.9	+5.1	–2
Southern Baptist	107/500	10.3	16.4	+6.1	+1
Nondenominational	22/31	13.6	12.9	–0.7	–2
Conserv. Protestant					
Adventist	16/25	18.8	12.0	–6.8	–6
Assembly of God	16/29	0.0	10.3	+10.3	+1
Other Pentacostal	91/157	3.3	7.0	+3.7	+1
Jehovah's Witness	23/43	0.0	7.0	+7.0	0

Source: General Social Survey (1983, 1984, 1998, 2000).

Table 2 presents educational attainment not in percent with college degree, but as average years of education, allowing for the influence of varying distributions to shape the reported number. The rankings in 1998/2000 are very similar to those in Table 1, with the top six and bottom six denominations matching in both. Again, more liberal groups cluster at the top, and more conservative, sectarian, Pentecostal, and black church groups cluster at the bottom. The disparity in total mean years of formal education completed, however, is not as large as with percent college degree. The top denominations in 1998/2000 reflect an average of about 14.5 years; the bottom denominations an average of about 12.5 years. These variations, however, suggest the difference between at least some college education and a high school diploma as the typical educational experience of adherents. Again, almost all groups enjoyed modest increases in mean years of education. And while a few groups jumped in ranking dramatically, the overall picture in Table 2 is one of stability in educational attainment between 1983/1984 and 1998/2000.

Table 3 presents means and over-time changes in household income for the different religious groups. In the top third for 1996, Jews, Unitarians, Latter-Day Saints, Episcopalians, and members of the PCUSA are joined by nondenominational conservative Protestants (evangelicals), who fared lower in the education tables. Many, but not all, of the same groups who are low in education are, not surprisingly, also low in income. The income variance between the top and the bottom is significant, with top third groups earning nearly twice as much on average as bottom third groups (\$51,871 and \$22,153 being the extremes for 1996). Compared to education, we also see greater variance in the change in mean income, ranging from a *decline* of \$7,476 for the

**TABLE 2**  
**MEAN ADULT EDUCATION, BY DENOMINATION, 1983–2000 (RANKED BY**  
**1998–2000 STATUS)**

Denomination	N/N (1980s/1990s)	Mean Years		Change in Mean Years	Change in Rank
		1983–1984	1998–2000		
Unitarian	8/18	16.38	16.39	+0.01	0
Jewish	70/113	14.80	15.69	+0.89	0
Episcopal	65/112	14.43	14.84	+0.41	0
Presbyterian USA	134/151	13.59	14.59	+1.00	0
UCC	14/17	13.07	13.82	+0.75	+3
United Methodist	126/374	13.23	13.65	+0.42	+1
ELCA	40/148	13.25	13.59	+0.34	-1
Nonreligious	224/794	12.87	13.58	+0.72	+2
LDS	66/32	13.41	13.50	+0.09	-4
Adventist	16/25	12.75	13.44	+0.69	+2
Conservative Methodist	22/25	11.59	13.32	+1.73	+6
American Baptist	16/41	11.69	13.24	+1.56	+2
Catholic	814/1384	12.32	13.15	+0.84	0
Missouri/Wisconsin Lutheran	32/104	12.91	13.10	+0.19	-5
Black Baptist	34/136	11.41	12.59	+1.18	+4
Southern Baptist	107/500	11.65	12.58	+0.93	-1
Nondenominational	22/31	12.82	12.52	-0.30	-6
Conserv. Protestant					
Jehovah's Witness	23/43	11.48	12.19	+0.71	0
Assembly of God	16/29	10.63	12.17	+1.55	-3
Other Pentacostal	91/157	10.20	11.81	+1.62	0

*Source:* General Social Survey (1983, 1984, 1998, 2000).

Evangelical Lutheran Church of America, to an increase of \$14,261 for Latter-Day Saints (again, low-*N* groups should be interpreted with caution here). Except for a few lower-*N* outliers, the overall ranking of groups between 1983/1984 and 1996 shifted only modestly.

Table 4 examines differences in occupational prestige ranked by 1998/2000 data. The religious groups range from a high of 52.05 for Jews to a low of 39.53 for American (Northern) Baptists. All but these two groups have mean occupational prestige scales in the 1940s, although differences between the groups roughly track differences noted in education and income (notable exceptions being the Assemblies of God and conservative Methodists in the top third on prestige, and the United Church of Christ being in the bottom third). As with the previous tables, with the exception of a few outliers, most groups moved only a few ranking places for occupational prestige between 1983/1984 and 1998/2000.

Finally, Table 5 attempts to summarize the socioeconomic changes observed in Tables 1–4 by calculating the average rank in education, income, and job prestige for each religious group, and comparing between the 1983/1984 and 1998/2000 average ranks to calculate the average rank change for the intervening time period. We see that the majority of religious groups, 16 of the total 20, changed ranks on average no more than two places; 12 of those groups in fact moved less than one ranking place. Overall, Table 5 suggests a picture of over-time stability in overall socioeconomic ranking. As to gainers and losers, to the extent that their somewhat low *N*s do not introduce sampling error here, the Assemblies of God were the biggest gainers and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ECLA), Adventists, and the United Church of Christ

**TABLE 3**  
**MEAN HOUSEHOLD INCOME, BY DENOMINATION, 1983–1996 (RANKED BY 1996 STATUS)**

Denomination	N/N (1980s/1990s)	Mean Income		Change in Mean Income	Change in Rank
		1983–1984	1996		
Jewish	70/68	50,579	51,871	+1,292	0
Unitarian	8/7	39,842	46,158	+6,317	+2
LDS	66/27	29,254	43,515	+14,261	+6
Episcopal	65/79	48,523	42,953	–5,571	–2
Presbyterian USA	134/63	36,481	40,300	+3,820	+1
Nondenominational	22/20	28,059	38,901	+10,843	+4
Conserv. Protestant					
Missouri/Wisconsin Lutheran	32/59	26,683	37,686	+11,003	+5
Catholic	814/685	31,122	35,788	+4,666	0
United Methodist	126/190	31,789	33,893	+2,105	–2
UCC	14/8	40,481	32,269	–8,213	–7
Assembly of God	16/23	18,848	30,346	+11,498	+9
Adventist	16/16	25,577	30,094	+4,517	+1
Nonreligious	224/339	27,963	29,086	+1,123	–2
ELCA	40/99	36,520	29,044	–7,476	–9
Southern Baptist	107/273	25,802	28,528	+2,726	–1
Jehovah's Witness	23/17	20,819	27,081	+6,262	+1
Black Baptist	34/69	23,342	23,793	+451	–1
American Baptist	16/28	19,476	23,321	+3,845	+1
Other Pentacostal	91/64	19,708	23,174	+3,466	–1
Conservative Methodist	22/15	24,029	22,153	–1,876	–5

Source: General Social Survey (1983, 1984, 1996).

Americans were the biggest socioeconomic losers between the early 1980s and late 1990s. The gainers, with a few exceptions, tended to be those at the bottom of the rankings, and thus had more upward room for mobility between the two periods of measurement. Most of those ranked at the top of the scales tended neither to gain nor to lose much in rankings, but simply maintained their high positions.

## DISCUSSION

This analysis is a response to the continuing need for an updating and reassessment of our knowledge about socioeconomic inequalities between American religious groups. The findings in the tables above suggest the following general observations.

1. *The American religious system at the end of the 20th century reflected major socioeconomic differences between groups within that system.* Certain religious groups—particularly Unitarians, Jews, Episcopalians, and mainline Presbyterians—consistently enjoyed significantly higher levels of education, income, and occupational prestige than most of the groups below them. Likewise, other religious groups—especially members of Jehovah's Witness, black Baptist, Southern Baptist, and other Pentecostal churches—displayed significantly lower levels of socioeconomic status than many other groups. Certain religious groups, on the other hand,

**TABLE 4**  
**MEAN OCCUPATIONAL PRESTIGE, BY DENOMINATION, 1983–1998 (RANKED BY**  
**1996–1998 STATUS)**

Denomination	N/N (1980s/1990s)	Mean Prestige		Change in Mean Prestige	Change in Rank
		1983–1984	1998–2000		
Jewish	70/113	49.50	52.05	+2.5	+1
Unitarian	8/18	51.38	49.44	–1.9	–1
Episcopal	65/112	45.79	49.35	+3.6	+1
Assembly of God	16/29	36.13	48.41	+12.3	+12
Presbyterian USA	134/151	45.53	47.69	+2.2	0
Conservative Methodist	22/25	38.45	47.00	+8.6	+7
United Methodist	126/374	43.02	46.42	+3.4	–1
Adventist	16/25	41.56	46.13	+4.6	0
ELCA	40/148	42.51	46.08	+3.6	–2
Nondenominational	22/31	38.32	44.83	+6.5	+4
Conserv. Protestant					
LDS	66/32	39.98	44.41	+4.4	0
Nonreligious	224/794	40.58	44.12	+3.5	–3
Catholic	814/1384	39.76	44.02	+4.3	–1
UCC	14/17	47.25	43.29	–4.0	–11
Missouri/Wisconsin Lutheran	32/104	40.23	43.06	+2.8	–5
Southern Baptist	107/500	36.68	42.86	+6.2	–1
Black Baptist	34/136	32.78	42.10	+9.3	+2
Jehovah's Witness	23/43	34.14	41.24	+7.1	0
Other Pentacostal	91/157	31.37	40.15	+8.8	+1
American Baptist	16/41	34.27	39.53	+5.3	–3

*Source:* General Social Survey (1983, 1984, 1998, 2000).

reveal noticeable levels of status inconsistencies. Assemblies of God members, for example, appear to have relatively low levels of education, moderate levels of income, and relatively high occupational prestige scores. Nondenominational conservative Protestants, similarly, reflect lower levels of education, higher levels of income, and moderate levels of job prestige. But on the whole, socioeconomic inequality across measures depicts a great deal of consistency in stratification. The structure of interreligious inequality that Roof and McKinney (1987) mapped of the 1970s and early 1980s continues to hold.

2. *The system of socioeconomic inequality that characterized American religion at the end of the 20th century reflects a high degree of stability in reproducing itself over the years between the early 1980s and the late 1990s.* Although some specific group mobility is evident in the tables above, there is much more continuity than change in the system of inequality. Despite the longest period of economic growth in the nation's history during the 1990s, with few exceptions, the groups that were ranked highest in 1983/1984 were also ranked highest in 1998/2000, and those ranked lowest in the first set of years were also ranked lowest in the second. Since Roof and McKinney's (1987) analysis of 1970s and early 1980s data, then, not a great deal has changed in the overall socioeconomic stratification of American religious groups. And although our comparative time frame is shorter, it may appear that the changes within the system that they observed for the mid-20th century have slowed down to produce a more stable system at the end of that century. Further investigation is needed to determine how our findings comport with those of Park and Reimer (2002).

**TABLE 5**  
**AVERAGE CHANGE IN SES RANKING, 1983–2000 (RANKED BY AVERAGE RANK CHANGE)**

Denomination	Average Rank (1980s)	Average Rank (1990s)	Average Rank Change (1980–1990)
Assembly of God	17.75	13.00	+4.75
Conservative Methodist	13.75	11.75	+2.00
LDS	6.25	7.25	+1.00
American Baptist	16.25	15.50	+0.75
Black Baptist	16.50	15.75	+0.75
Missouri/Wisconsin Lutheran	12.00	11.25	+0.75
Presbyterian USA	4.75	4.50	+0.25
Jehovah's Witness	18.25	18.00	+0.25
Jewish	1.50	1.50	0.00
Unitarian	1.50	1.50	0.00
Nondenominational	12.25	12.25	0.00
Conserv. Protestant			
Other Pentecostal	19.00	19.25	−0.25
Catholic	11.50	11.75	−0.25
Episcopal	3.00	3.25	−0.25
Southern Baptist	15.00	15.50	−0.50
United Methodist	6.75	7.50	−0.75
Nonreligious	8.75	10.00	−1.25
UCC	5.75	8.50	−2.75
Adventist	11.00	7.50	−3.50
ELCA	6.00	10.25	−4.25

*Source:* General Social Survey (1983, 1984, 1996, 1998, 2000).

3. *The socioeconomic inequality evident in the American religious system appears to be patterned by theology, race and ethnicity, and liturgical style.* As a generalization, the higher ranked religious groups tend to be more theologically liberal denominations and traditions, while the lowest ranked tend to be more conservative and sectarian. The highest ranked tend toward more hierarchical and federated church polities, whereas the lower ranked tend to represent more “low-church,” congregational, or “believer’s church” traditions. Socioeconomically higher ranked religious groups also tend to involve more formal, liturgical, tradition-oriented styles of worship; lower ranked groups tend toward more openly expressive, informal, emotional, and “Spirit-filled” styles of worship. Finally, we know from the racial composition of religious communities that more highly ranked groups tend to have high percentages of whites as members, while lower ranked groups tend to include more racial minorities, particularly black Baptists and Pentecostals and non-Catholic Hispanic Pentecostals. Most of this follows similar observations by Roof and McKinney (1987) about the 1970s and early 1980s.

Explaining exactly how and why socioeconomic inequalities map onto and reproduce themselves within the American religious system will require further research, which cross-sectional survey data such as that analyzed here will not be able to address. Some of the forces at work, such as race, very likely have little directly to do with religion. As African Americans, for example, are socioeconomically disadvantaged in America’s racialized society, and African Americans cluster in African-American religious denominations, then African Americans’ socioeconomic disadvantage inevitably shows up in their religious denominations (see Sherkat and Ellison 1991). And

since both socioeconomic inequality and religious affiliation operate by similar forces of social reproduction and homophily, it is not surprising that the socioeconomic stratification of American religion persists over time.

At the same time, following Weber (1958), we might suppose that religious factors also help to sustain and reproduce some of the socioeconomic inequalities noted above. It may be that different theologies and worship styles are more comfortable for people with different levels of education or different kinds of occupations (Demerath 1965; Fukuyama 1960). Fully entering into an Episcopal liturgical service of worship, for instance, requires a greater appreciation for historical tradition and elegant precision in the English language—both arguably associated with higher education—than most Southern Baptist or Pentecostal services. Religious belief systems and moral orders may also socialize members in ways that directly shape their educational and occupational aspirations. Beyerlein (2004) and Darnell and Sherkat (1997), for example, have argued that Pentecostal and fundamentalist Christianity discourages their adherents from pursuing advanced degrees in higher education. Given what we know about network effects in reproducing business and political elite statuses and in searching for jobs, it is likely that religious congregational involvement plays a significant role in generating advantage and disadvantage.

Future longitudinal survey, ethnographic, and community-studies research might pursue a number of related questions to understand better the dynamics of socioeconomic stratification in American religion. (1) To what degree do religious believers who over time experience upward socioeconomic mobility switch to new religious traditions that correspond to their new levels of education, income, or job prestige (see Roof 1989; Sherkat 1991)? (2) How do religious believers who are well above or below the socioeconomic averages of their own religious traditions manage the identity tensions and discrepancies in cultural capital resulting from the status differences? (3) In what ways do the religious cultures of faith traditions themselves help to socialize members to reproduce the socioeconomic status of their religious group (see Beyerlein 2004; Darnell and Sherkat 1997)? (4) How does divorce and interreligious marrying interact with the socioeconomic positions of the divorcing and uniting spouses to affect spouse's status mobility and the socioeconomic outcomes of their children (see Lawton and Bures 2001; Musick and Wilson 1995)? (5) How do religious denominations such as the Assemblies of God, which may be experiencing upward socioeconomic status mobility, negotiate the internal cultural evolutions in identity, discourse, belief, and practices that such mobility sets into motion? (6) How do socioeconomic locations and theological orientations interact to sustain each other, in ways perhaps suggested by Marx (1978a, 1978b) and Hunter (1983)? (7) How do interracial congregations negotiate possible issues arising around socioeconomic status as they affect religious culture and practices (see DeYoung et al. 2003)?

## CONCLUSION

American religion has from the beginning been stratified socioeconomically. American sociology has long documented and theorized persistent inequalities between religious communities. Socioeconomic inequalities between religious groups have also played an important role in many broader sociological theories about religion and society. Since the publication of a collection of important works published in the mid-20th century, however, the social stratification of American religion has been a curiously understudied topic. This research note is an attempt to help update our descriptive knowledge about socioeconomic inequalities between American religious groups. Tracking educational, income, and job status inequality over a 16-year period, from the early 1980s to the late 1990s, we have found that socioeconomic inequality in the American religious system has been persistent and stable—suggesting that the mid-20th century's significant mobility within this system may be declining. Further ethnographic, longitudinal survey, and community-studies research is needed to better understand the causal forces and cultural dynamics of the socioeconomic stratification of American religion, and how inequality between religious groups

may interact with and help to sustain the larger system of socioeconomic inequality in the United States.

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