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'Blessed are the Poor': The Weberian Spirit of Capitalism Under Experimental Scrutiny

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'Blessed are the Poor'

The Weberian Spirit of Capitalism Under Experimental Scrutiny*

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Abstract

This paper experimentally examines Max Weber's thesis on the influence of religious narratives – particularly the Protestant Ethic – on attitudes toward wealth redistribution. Weber argued that the Protestant Reformation fostered the belief that economic success signals divine favour, thereby legitimising wealth inequality. We test this idea using a variation of the dictator game, leveraging a religious narrative that casts the dictator's role – and the endowment of wealth – as a divine *blessing*. By exogenously evoking the *blessing-of-wealth* narrative to different religious groups, we then examine how subjects' redistribution behaviour is affected. Our findings reveal that low-income Protestants exposed to the *blessing* narrative are significantly less inclined to redistribute wealth than their Catholic counterparts, consistent with Weber's claim that Protestantism can serve to rationalise inequality through the lens of divine providence. A complementary narrative analysis further reveals that Protestants, Calvinists, Methodists, and Atheists tend to interpret blessings as a sign of divine election that is contingent upon wealth. In contrast, Catholics more often associate them with spiritual meanings alone. These results underscore the decisive role of religious narratives in shaping economic preferences, providing empirical support for Weber's enduring thesis.

Keywords: experimental economics; Max Weber; religious narratives; pro-social behaviour; redistribution.

JEL Codes: J14; J15; Z12; Z1.

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1 Introduction

In his pioneering study of the Economics of Religion, Iannaccone (1998) distinguished three main directions for this old/new field of study. First, scholars can employ economic categories to interpret religious behaviour, for example, applying utility functions to understand personal faith. Second, religious studies and theological ideas can serve as a reference point to evaluate and eventually critique economic policies — consider the inquiries into the theological notion of debt to foster debt relief for poor countries (Lysaught, 2015). Finally, another line of investigation can be used to study the economic consequences of religion (Benjamin et al., 2016). In this paper, we take a third direction, examining how religious beliefs and narratives may influence preferences for redistribution.

Like many of our predecessors – see the section devoted to the literature review – our starting point is Max Weber's book *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*. Our study aims to test one of Weber's core considerations experimentally. Following Weber, a key impact of the Protestant Reformation – especially in its Calvinist form – was the diffusion of the narrative according to which economic prosperity serves as a visible sign of God's favor and blessing. *"God Himself blessed His chosen ones through the success of their labours"* (Weber, 2005). The Reformation shifted the focus of religious life from monastic and spiritual experiences to everyday actions and behaviours. Protestantism connected a framework of psychological rewards and punishments, similar to what religions typically associate with sacred activities, to the performance of daily responsibilities and professional duties. Weber argues that the secularization of this Protestant Ethic is linked to the rise of capitalism.

We are interested in testing one of the consequences of the notion of being 'blessed': *"A specifically bourgeois economic ethic had grown up [...] the consciousness of standing in the fullness of God's grace and being visibly blessed by Him [...] gave him the comforting assurance that the unequal distribution of the goods of this world was a special dispensation of Divine Providence which in these differences as in particular grace pursued secret ends unknown to men"* (Weber, 2005). In other words, people who perceive richness and economic success as the fruit of a 'blessing' are more inclined to legitimise wealth inequalities and con-

sequently less inclined to redistribute. Hence, our research question: Is the narrative of *'being chosen'* so influential on human behaviour regarding redistribution matters? As the section devoted to the literature review illustrates, although we are not the first to empirically address this question, our specific sample, methods, and results make a significant contribution to advancing and enriching the ongoing debate. More specifically, we are the first to experimentally test the existence of religious narratives related to the Weberian hypothesis.

In this study, we empirically test Weber's thesis through an experiment, specifically a variation of the Dictator Game. In our bargaining setting, which we fictionally refer to as the *'Blessed Game'*, we modify the framing (Dufwenberg et al., 2011) of the standard dictator game by introducing an entitlement effect. We exogenously vary the wording of the standard dictator game in the instructions: in the treatment group, the participants are told that one – those who play as dictator – will be *'the blessed'*, whereas, in the control group, the players are named *'player 1'* and *'player 2'*. In the treatment and control groups, we measure the recipient's expectation, i.e., how much the recipient thinks that the other participant (i.e., the dictator) is willing to share and how much the dictator shares.

A key aspect of our work is to understand whether our treatment may activate the hypothesized underlying religious narratives. For this reason, once participants had made their choice/guess, they were to answer an open-ended question asking: "What does 'to be blessed' mean to you?". We analyze answers to this question to investigate possible narratives linked to the Weberian hypothesis.

Our pool is recruited through Prolific and is composed of individuals based in the United States. To make the Weberian hypothesis salient, the pool comprises four groups: Catholics, Calvinists and Methodists, Atheists, and Protestants. Why do we focus on Protestants, Calvinists, and Methodists? Two reasons guide this design feature. The conceptual reason highlights that Weber's 'Protestant Ethic' primarily applied not only to German Lutherans but also to Calvinist and Methodist immigrants in the US. Since Weber's time, however, Protestant denominations have proliferated, and secularization has occurred, leading to self-identified religious affiliations that may not precisely align with Weber's categories. Many individuals who identify as Protestants today closely resemble adherents of either Calvinist or Methodist (or

other confessions). Thus, we differentiate between two definitions of 'Protestant': a broad historical perspective that encompasses all groups originating from the Christian schism (such as Protestants, Calvinists, and Methodists, as opposed to Catholics), and a narrower definition that pertains explicitly to Protestant self-identification. Here, the conceptual and pragmatic reasons converge. Official statistics show that the number of self-identified Protestants significantly exceeds that of Calvinists and Methodists (Grammich et al., 2023), making it pertinent to include discussions of these three religious classifications.

According to the Weberian Hypothesis, Methodists, Calvinists, and Protestants should perceive the 'blessing' of wealth as a signal of being part of the community of the chosen ones (the dictators in our experiment). This narrative should bring the Calvinist, Methodist, and Protestant dictators to be less disposed than Catholics or atheists to share their wealth with the non-elected. In parallel, the 'blessing' narrative should also bring Calvinist, Methodist, and Protestant recipients the expectation of a lower amount from the dictator. As a complement to the Weberian framework, we expect the Catholic attitude toward the 'blessing' of wealth to be less punchy and to have more to do with the logic of the gift. In Catholicism, wealth is considered one of God's gifts to humanity, and therefore, it is something to be shared with fellow humans as God commands. Consequently, we expect Catholic dictators not to be affected by manipulation; if anything, they should be more inclined to redistribute, and Catholic recipients should expect more from the dictators. The two religious narratives are different yet complementary, and should help explain the varying preferences and behaviours of the people affected by them.

Our results show that, compared to Catholics, Protestants and Atheists are less likely to interpret the blessing as something related to spirituality, and are more likely to interpret the blessing as something related to material wealth. We find no such differences between Methodists and Calvinists, and Catholics. We try to understand who drives these results, and we find that the results are driven by low-income individuals. When we look at actual behavior, we find that people exposed to the 'blessed' narrative tend to redistribute less than those not exposed. This effect is present overall, although it is not statistically significant.

Again, the most interesting effect emerges when we consider individual income differences.

The low-income participants from the Protestant group appear to be significantly affected by the 'blessed' narrative because, relative to Catholics, when they are dictators, they redistribute less. When they are recipients, they expect to receive less than their Catholic counterparts. This reveals that the religious narratives entailed in the Protestant Ethic legitimize inequalities in the eyes of the 'poor', and it is consistent with literature in social sciences suggesting that poor individuals are those who need to justify the existence of inequality since they bear the cost of an unequal society (Bénabou and Tirole, 2006, Furnham, 2003).

Since our findings rely on a relatively small sample, we try to understand their external validity. Using data from the Integrated Value Survey, we investigate the correlation between religious identity and inequality acceptance, and we find that the difference between Protestants and Catholics is driven by low-income individuals. This final investigation appears to confirm the findings of our experiment.

The paper is organised as follows: We first review the literature to contextualise our paper among the current studies on the topic and emphasise our contribution. Then we expose our experimental methodology. Consequently, we present our findings and discuss them, also discussing the limitations of our analysis and the possibilities for future research.

2 Literature Review

Our analysis intersects multiple branches of literature on the economic consequences of religion. Building on Weber's analysis, some authors have investigated the impact of Protestantism on financial/economic performance. Becker and Woessmann (2009) employed country-level data from late 19th-century Prussia to show how Protestantism was associated with higher economic prosperity, primarily due to its superior literacy and education compared to Catholicism. More recently, Nunziata and Rocco (2016) reported how Protestants from Switzerland, a religious minority in comparison to Calvinists and Methodists, had more chances to become entrepreneurs than Catholics. They found similar results (Nunziata and Rocco, 2018) when examining the former Holy Roman Empire regions (mainly Germany): Protestants had 5% more chances of starting a business than Catholics. Focusing on a slightly different topic, Spenkuch

(2017) showed how Protestants work more hours than Catholics (even if this is not reflected in their respective salaries). The affinity between these studies and ours lies in the common focus on comparing Catholic and Protestant economic behaviours.

Closer to our analysis are the studies that concentrate on the effect of religion on pro-social behaviour. In two related studies, Norenzayan and Shariff (2008) and Shariff and Norenzayan (2007) investigated the conditions under which religion promotes prosocial behaviour. They ran a dictator game (Shariff and Norenzayan, 2007) where the treatment group was implicitly exposed to the concept of God. They discovered that the willingness to give money to strangers increased when the presence of God was implicitly recalled. This result was valid for both samples they employed, i.e., college students from the University of British Columbia and a more representative Canadian community in Vancouver. Interestingly, they found that self-reported religiosity had little to no impact on prosocial behaviour compared to the implicit recall of God, secular institutions, or social reputation (Norenzayan and Shariff, 2008). These results have been critically revised by Gomes and McCullough (2015), who showed that with a larger sample and a change in wording of the priming, there is no relation between religious priming and generosity in the dictator game. While we also adopt a dictator game framework, we find that self-reported religiosity is associated with specific preferences for redistribution between different religious groups. Therefore, we differ from Shariff and Norenzayan (2007) and the similar results found by Ahmed and Salas (2011), who argued that self-reported religiosity is unrelated to cooperation in the dictator and prisoner dilemma games.

The real target of our analysis is the literature focused on religion and (preference for) redistribution. Indirectly, we engage with studies like the one by Manow (2004), which showed how Reform Protestant Movements (Calvinism, Anabaptism, and others) are suspicious of state authority and seek to restrict welfare state development in countries such as Britain, Switzerland, and the Netherlands. More directly, our research is built upon Bénabou and Tirole (2006), which shows how the Protestant work ethic narrative causes religious individuals to opt for low tax rates to avoid income redistribution in favour of non-religious or less-religious citizens. Another example of a study that inspired us is the paper by Guiso et al. (2006), where through a study conducted via the General Social Survey with a sample of United States cit-

izens, it is shown that religious people (Catholic, Protestant, Jewish) have a more negative attitude to redistribution than non-religious people. A similar finding has been presented by Neustadt (2011), who conducted a Discrete Choice experiment in Switzerland and found that non-religious individuals have a higher marginal willingness to pay than religious individuals. Similar considerations are present in Kirchmaier et al. (2018).

Neustadt's analysis also compared different religions: Protestants and Catholics. He found that the connection between Protestantism and the lower willingness to pay of Protestants compared to Catholics is partially confirmed, but not statistically significant. Our paper presents different results: low-income Protestants are less inclined to redistribute and less likely to expect redistribution from others. In this sense, our study confirms the result of Basten and Betz (2013), who through an analysis of the votes to referenda in Switzerland, found that Protestants and Calvinists support less redistribution and government intervention than Catholics. Similar results were reported in a paper by Jordan (2014). Analysing data from the European Social Survey on welfare state attitudes in 13 European countries, they found that Catholics – whether self-identified or living in culturally Catholic contexts – are more supportive of redistribution than Protestants. While we do not distinguish between welfare state provision and private charity or philanthropy, our study expands this strand of literature by offering an empirically grounded explanation of Protestant attitudes toward redistribution, drawing on the notion of the 'blessed' narrative.

3 Methodology and Data

3.1 Experimental Design

To examine the influence of religious narratives, we conducted a Prolific-based (Palan and Schitter, 2018) economic experiment that builds on the standard incentivized dictator game (DG) with anonymous recipients (Forsythe et al., 1994). In this game, participants are randomly paired, with one assigned the role of dictator and the other the role of recipient. The dictator receives an endowment of 100 points (each worth 0.01 USD) and decides how many points to transfer to the recipient. The recipient, in turn, guesses how many points the dictator will keep.

A correct guess earns the recipient an additional 0.20 USD.

The game structure is identical across treatment and control groups, but the instructions differ. In the control condition, participants are referred to neutrally as Participant 1 (dictator) and Participant 2 (recipient), and the random assignment of roles is explicitly stated. In the treatment condition, the dictator is instead referred to as *The Blessed*, and the detail about random role assignment is deliberately omitted.

This loaded configuration of the instructions is designed to reflect Weber's interpretation of the Protestant believer's experience, where being "blessed" carries a divine significance. Highlighting the role of chance in assigning this status could undermine the perceived spiritual meaning. While Divine Providence and randomness are not necessarily incompatible, in our experimental context, they may appear so —hence, the emphasis on randomization is retained only in the control group's instructions.

This modification is intended to enhance the dictator's sense of entitlement —that is, the psychological tendency to believe one deserves more than others or is entitled to preferential treatment, even in the absence of objective justification. It may also activate an underlying narrative that serves to legitimize unequal outcomes (Major, 1994).

Following the incentivized interaction, participants complete a brief survey consisting of three questions. These three questions aim to investigate the role of narratives and whether individuals are more or less willing to accept inequalities.

In detail, the first question is an open-ended prompt that asks individuals: "What does 'to be blessed' mean to you?" Respondents had to answer using at least 30 words. The analysis of this question is crucial in our study to understand if the choice of the dictator game is justified -in the eyes of the participants- by an existing religious narrative or not.

The remaining two questions are standard items in the study of attitudes toward inequalities: one asks whether success is more attributable to luck or hard work, and the other gauges perceptions of inequality by asking to what extent participants believe that inequality is too high. These two questions help us understand whether behavior, narratives, and acceptance of inequality are aligned or not.

Hypothesis This experimental design aims to test the core of the Weberian hypothesis. As explained in the introduction, according to Weber, the Protestant community is composed of individuals who worked diligently and for whom wealth is a sign of God's election. This narrative should make the Calvinists and Methodists and the Protestant dictators less willing than Catholics or atheists to share their wealth with the non-elected. Interestingly enough, the 'blessing' narrative should also bring Calvinists and Methodists, and Protestant recipients, to expect a lower amount from the dictator. As a complement to the Weberian framework, the Catholic attitude toward the 'blessing' of wealth is less punchy and has more to do with the logic of the gift. Therefore, we expect Catholic dictators not to be affected by the manipulation; if anything, they should be more inclined to redistribute, as well as Catholic recipients to expect more from the dictators.

Hence, we formulate the following hypothesis:

- **H1** The loaded treatment should activate a narrative related to wealth in Methodists and Calvinists, and Protestants, relative to Catholics.
- **H2** The treatment should push Methodists and Calvinists, and Protestants, to redistribute less and to tolerate inequality more (as measured by the recipient's guess) relative to Catholics.

3.2 Experimental Protocol

The study has been pre-registered on the Open Science Framework and the School Research Ethics Committee of Cardiff Business School, Cardiff University has approved it (ref: 1440). The study was administered through Otree (Chen et al., 2016). The participants were recruited from Prolific, a professional platform that enables researchers to recruit participants for surveys or experiments. It has been successfully utilised in economics, psychology, and social sciences in general (Callan et al., 2017, Marreiros et al., 2017).

Prolific allows researchers to select the subject pools based on specific characteristics. For our study, we recruited participants based in the USA. Furthermore, we selected participants according to their declared religious belonging to investigate possible differences in narratives and whether these narratives affect actual behaviours. Overall, our sample comprises 837 in-

dividuals, including 218 atheists, 195 Calvinists or Methodists, 217 Catholics, and 207 Protestants. The summary statistics of our sample are presented in Appendix A, which also includes a balance test of the overall sample.

4 Results

In this section, we first present an analysis of the actual narrative activation generated by our exogenous manipulation, and then report the results of the dictator game and discuss possible effects on opinions about the level of inequality.

4.1 Analysis of Narrative Activation

We analyse the answers to the open-ended questions to understand how different religious groups conceive and internalize the 'blessing' narrative. More specifically, we investigate whether our exogenous manipulation may activate specific narratives within religious groups. Indeed, following Weber (Weber, 2005), we hypothesized that, relative to Catholics, Calvinists, Methodists, and Protestants in the treatment group would be more likely to interpret the blessing in terms of material wealth rather than through spiritual lenses.

We analyse the open-ended question with artificial intelligence methods to find the dominant traits. Specifically, we employed a powerful language model (GPT-4) to perform topic modeling[1] We found 5 dominant topics, which are:

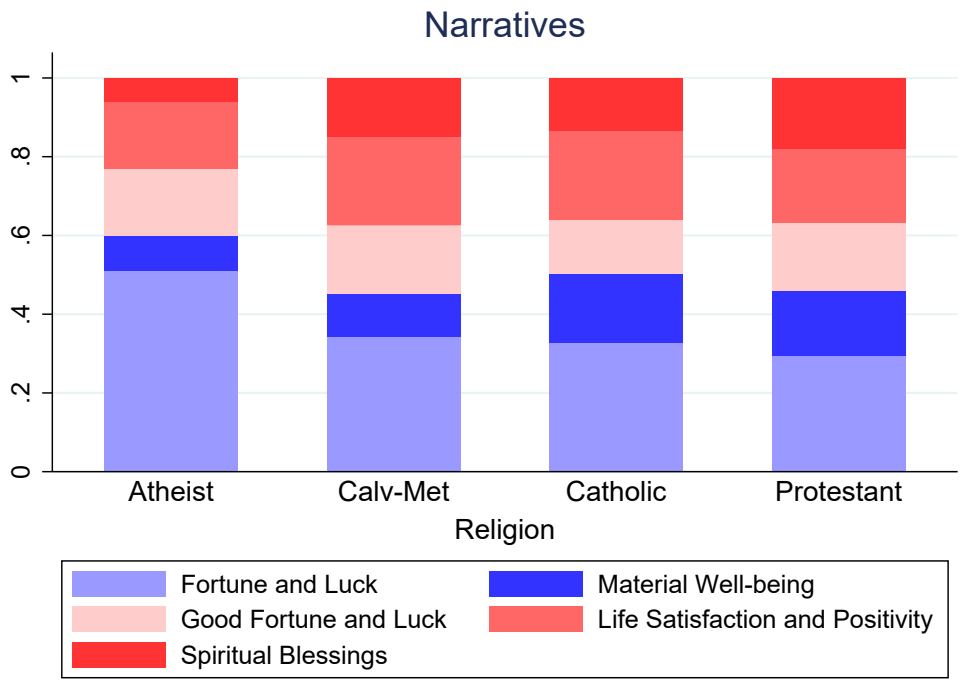
- Fortune and Luck: This topic is likely identified frequently due to common associations between blessings and luck or fortune. Many people may interpret blessings as events or states of being that are significantly influenced by luck. As an example, an answer labelled with this narrative is: *Someone who is fortunate enough to have fallen upon good luck. It means that they're blessed or lucky enough to have something. An athlete is lucky to be blessed with abilities.*
- Life Satisfaction and Positivity: Blessings are often associated with a sense of life satisfaction and positive feelings. This category captures narratives that emphasise personal

[1]We opted for artificial intelligence methods, as they are more effective than traditional computational models for text analysis (Rathje et al., 2024).

happiness, contentment, and positive life circumstances. As an example, an answer labelled with this narrative is: *It means to be fortunate in life, to have supportive family and friends and to enjoy life to the fullest. It means being able to do the things you enjoy without worrying about other matters.*

- Good Fortune and Luck: Similar to the "Fortune and Luck" category, it might be differentiated by a specific emphasis on good fortune. This could involve narratives where blessings are directly equated to good luck or fortunate events. As an example, an answer labelled with this narrative is: *To be very fortunate, to often have good things happen to you, that the universe treats you and your family well, even more good things are coming your way.*
- Material Well-being: This topic encompasses broader interpretations of blessings, including overall well-being, health, and general life satisfaction, beyond specific instances of luck or spiritual blessings. As an example, an answer labelled with this narrative is: *To be fortunate in life. To have enough money, you can buy things that you want in addition to things that you need. To be in good health. To have close friends and family. To be able to do what you want when you want to. To be gainfully employed and have a roof over your head.*
- Spiritual Blessings: This category captures the religious or spiritual aspect of blessings. Narratives in this category might highlight divine favour, spiritual growth, or religious interpretations of being blessed. For example, an answer labelled with this narrative is: *It means that God is looking out for you and protecting you. It means he is taking care of you. You are under his care. You are under his wing, and you will be saved. You will be protected from harm.*

Figure 1: Differences in Narratives



Notes: The Figure shows differences in dominant topic by religious group.

Table E1 shows the most frequent words for each topic, while Figure 1 shows the distributions of the topic for each religious group. Examining the results of our classification, it is clear that most individuals associate the idea of being blessed with luck, fortune, or positivity. In fact, although with slightly different perspectives, 3 out of the five main topics relate to fortune or luck. Nevertheless, we also find some evidence of the hypothesized religious narratives. More specifically, we do see people associating the blessing with material wealth or spirituality.

To test our hypothesis, we need to understand whether people who engage in these two narratives belong to some specific groups, and, even more importantly, whether our loaded instruction of the dictator game somehow activates these narratives. To this aim, we build a dummy variable equal to 1 if the narrative used is the one labelled 'Spiritual Blessing' and 0 otherwise. We also define a second variable that takes a value of 1 if the narrative used is labelled 'Material Well-Being' and 0 otherwise. If the Weberian hypothesis is confirmed, we should find that Methodists, Calvinists, and Protestants in the treated group are more willing to discuss material well-being relative to Catholics. On the other hand, treated Catholics should be more prone to talk about spirituality since they should interpret the blessing as an intangible

'gift' from God.

Results The results displayed in the first column of Table 1 suggest that, compared with Catholics, all treated groups are less likely to engage the 'Spiritual Blessings' narrative, while they are more likely to adopt the 'Material Well-Being' narrative. When investigating the significance of our results, however, we find that only Protestants and Atheists significantly differ from Catholics. Overall, our results appear to confirm the Weberian hypothesis. Indeed, the loaded framing of the 'blessing' game truly activates the narratives described by Weber. In other words, Protestants appear to perceive the blessing as something that pertains to a direct relationship with divinity, and among its main features is the idea of 'being chosen.' Catholics appear more inclined to disentangle the idea of blessing as having a good life from the divine intervention, and this might be due to one of the core aspects of Catholicism, i.e., mediation (by the Church, both in its structure and sacraments) between the person and God. We did not expect to find these results among the Atheists. In fact, when compared with Catholics, they appear to be quite similar to Protestants. This result may be due to the 'secularization hypothesis'. Weber argued that the Protestant Ethic shaped attitudes toward wealth not only among self-identified Protestants, such as Calvinists and Methodists, but also among those influenced by religious ideas within society's cultural fabric, even if they did not formally declare themselves believers. This could explain why atheists, who do not endorse or even reject religious ideas, are still impacted by religious ideas as secularized notions —those lacking any reference to God or an afterlife.

Since our main results reveal some interesting, yet relatively weak, associations, we decided to explore the potential effects of religious narratives and the acceptance of inequality in greater detail. More specifically, we are interested in understanding who is driving these results and why. To this end, we divide our sample by income level[2]. The results, presented in Columns 2 and 3 of Table 1, suggest that narratives aimed at justifying inequalities are primarily used by low-income individuals. This is in line with the literature suggesting that the psychological cost of inequality – and the consequent willingness to believe in narratives justifying inequality

[2]To split the sample, we categorize low-income individuals as those who have a household income lower than 50,000 USD, as the guidelines suggest (Shrider and Creamer, 2023)

– is mainly borne by low-income individuals (Bénabou and Tirole, 2006, Mijs, 2019).

Table 1: Effect of Blessing on Narratives

	Spiritual Blessings Full Sample	Spiritual Blessings High Income	Spiritual Blessings Low Income
Treated	0.056	0.050	0.084
	(0.046)	(0.056)	(0.087)
Treated × Atheist	-0.109*	-0.161*	-0.086
	(0.065)	(0.088)	(0.111)
Treated × Calvinist-Methodist	-0.024	-0.015	-0.040
	(0.066)	(0.081)	(0.125)
Treated × Protestant	-0.176***	-0.136*	-0.301**
	(0.065)	(0.080)	(0.126)
	General Well-Being Full Sample	General Well-Being High Income	General Well-Being Low Income
Treated	-0.127***	-0.070	-0.220**
	(0.047)	(0.057)	(0.088)
Treated × Atheist	0.069	-0.053	0.230**
	(0.066)	(0.090)	(0.112)
Treated × Calvinist-Methodist	0.070	-0.009	0.204
	(0.067)	(0.083)	(0.126)
Treated × Protestant	0.124*	0.013	0.290**
	(0.066)	(0.082)	(0.127)
Basic Controls	Yes	Yes	Yes
Labour Market Controls	Yes	Yes	Yes
Political Orientation Controls	Yes	Yes	Yes
Subjective Social Status	Yes	Yes	Yes
Observations	833	540	293

Notes: OLS Estimates. Basic controls are total approvals, gender, age, age squared, ethnicity, education, and marital status. Labor market controls include employment status. Standard errors in parentheses. *** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1

4.2 Empirical Analysis

After the analysis of the narratives, we are interested in understanding people's actual behavior, i.e. we would like to understand if the narratives go hand in hand with economic behavior or not.

We show the main results of our modified dictator game in Tables 2 and 3. We progressively control for sociodemographic and socioeconomic factors to exclude the possibility that results are driven by age, gender, ethnicity, education, marital status, employment conditions, perceived socioeconomic status, or political ideology. The Tables displaying the complete list of controls can be found in Appendix B. In Appendix C, we replicate our main results using Tobit models and controlling for participation in religious activities. Table 2 (Panel a) shows the results of our full sample. Qualitatively, the results suggest that Protestants tend to hold on to more. However, these results are never statistically significant, indicating that, on average, our treatment has not affected behaviour in the dictator game.

Results in Table 3 (Panel a) are also in this direction, although we find that both Protestants, Calvinists, and Methodists expect less money from the 'blessed' when compared with Catholics.

We also report the results of individuals' stated preferences over the level of inequality in Table 4 (Panel a). Specifically, we report the results of the variable built around the answers to the question in the post-experiment questionnaire that asks: To what extent do you agree with the statement: in your country, differences in income are too large. Also in this case, we find no statistically significant differences.

Since we have noticed that the activation of the narratives depends on income levels, we decided to split the sample by income level also in this case[3]. Interestingly, when we focus on low-income individuals, we find that 'blessed' protestants are more willing to keep a higher amount of money for themselves, are more willing to think that the dictators will keep a higher amount, and are also more likely to tolerate inequality. The size of these effects is economically relevant as it ranges from 40 to 50% of the mean in the dictator game, and it is around 16%

[3]In Appendix D, we show the results interacting income levels with the treatment variables, and the results do not change significantly.

of the sample mean as regards statements about inequality[4]. Overall, our results are consistent with the idea that low-income individuals have a greater need to modify their beliefs to bear the psychological cost of inequality (Furnham, 2003). Overall, we find that religious narratives may be used to justify income inequality.

Table 2: Effect of Blessing (Dictators)

	Keep	Keep	Keep	Keep
Panel a: All				
Treated	2.915	2.205	2.675	2.697
	(4.434)	(4.587)	(4.568)	(4.574)
Treated × Atheist	-0.684	-0.562	-1.330	-1.362
	(6.268)	(6.430)	(6.403)	(6.412)
Treated × Calvinist-Methodist	0.268	1.041	-0.299	-0.363
	(6.529)	(6.655)	(6.654)	(6.666)
Treated × Protestant	1.559	1.604	0.185	0.204
	(6.349)	(6.497)	(6.491)	(6.499)
Observations	416	416	416	416
R2	0.069	0.160	0.179	0.179
Panel b: High Income				
Treated	5.786	4.891	4.762	4.797
	(5.460)	(5.818)	(5.735)	(5.731)
Treated × Atheist	-2.191	-1.606	-2.748	-2.981
	(8.353)	(9.078)	(8.980)	(8.976)
Treated × Calvinist-Methodist	4.511	2.087	1.753	1.925
	(8.350)	(8.723)	(8.622)	(8.616)
Treated × Protestant	-8.345	-9.503	-11.098	-11.045
	(7.809)	(8.265)	(8.143)	(8.137)
Observations	274	274	274	274
R2	0.072	0.168	0.210	0.215
Panel b: Low Income				
Treated	-5.254	-7.182	-7.107	-5.277
	(7.656)	(8.765)	(8.783)	(8.651)
Treated × Atheist	6.924	9.844	9.597	8.099
	(9.626)	(10.683)	(10.796)	(10.606)
Treated × Calvinist-Methodist	-4.020	3.673	1.272	-2.073
	(10.506)	(11.630)	(11.596)	(11.469)
Treated × Protestant	26.018**	34.435***	38.725***	38.618***
	(11.220)	(12.850)	(12.841)	(12.590)
Observations	142	142	142	142
R2	0.137	0.337	0.382	0.412
Mean Dep. Var.	66.17	66.17	66.17	66.17
Basic Controls	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Labour Market Controls	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Political Orientation Controls	No	No	Yes	Yes
Subjective Social Status	No	No	No	Yes

Notes: OLS Estimates. Basic controls are total approvals, gender, age, age squared, ethnicity, education, and marital status. Labor market controls include employment status. Standard errors in parentheses. *** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1

[4]However, we find no effects on the question asking whether luck or merit is the driver of economic success. This may suggest that, at least in our case, if treated, low-income Protestants are more willing to accept inequality, but they are less likely to change beliefs about the source of inequality.

Table 3: Effect of Blessing (Recipients)

	Guess	Guess	Guess	Guess
Panel a: All				
Treated	-6.070	-7.003	-6.387	-6.322
	(5.000)	(5.159)	(5.208)	(5.227)
Treated × Atheist	4.184	4.338	3.385	3.319
	(7.081)	(7.344)	(7.407)	(7.427)
Treated × Calvinist-Methodist	7.288	6.449	6.342	6.202
	(7.239)	(7.383)	(7.422)	(7.473)
Treated × Protestant	9.361	9.494	9.176	9.143
	(7.225)	(7.361)	(7.384)	(7.396)
Observations	417	417	417	417
R2	0.042	0.138	0.143	0.144
Panel b: High Income				
Treated	-1.961	2.280	2.917	3.180
	(6.336)	(6.550)	(6.673)	(6.687)
Treated × Atheist	-7.050	-10.896	-10.677	-11.086
	(9.731)	(9.993)	(10.149)	(10.172)
Treated × Calvinist-Methodist	2.953	-5.184	-5.606	-6.017
	(8.876)	(9.022)	(9.096)	(9.119)
Treated × Protestant	0.124	-5.486	-6.389	-6.240
	(9.337)	(9.421)	(9.565)	(9.575)
Observations	266	266	266	266
R2	0.044	0.250	0.254	0.256
Panel b: Low Income				
Treated	-13.638	-9.184	-6.278	-7.429
	(8.319)	(9.362)	(9.619)	(9.710)
Treated × Atheist	17.646	9.407	6.285	7.015
	(11.124)	(12.701)	(12.897)	(12.933)
Treated × Calvinist-Methodist	14.680	7.566	6.519	9.483
	(13.110)	(14.622)	(14.902)	(15.268)
Treated × Protestant	31.505**	24.568*	22.894	23.824*
	(12.541)	(13.786)	(13.871)	(13.920)
Observations	151	151	151	151
R2	0.086	0.244	0.268	0.274
Mean Dep. Var.	55.17	55.17	55.17	55.17
Basic Controls	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Labour Market Controls	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Political Orientation Controls	No	No	Yes	Yes
Subjective Social Status	No	No	No	Yes

Notes: OLS Estimates. Basic controls are total approvals, gender, age, age squared, ethnicity, education, and marital status. Labor market controls include employment status. Standard errors in parentheses. *** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1

Table 4: Effect of Blessing on Opinions

	Ineq. too large	Ineq. too large	Ineq. too large	Ineq. too large
Panel a: All				
Treated	0.113	0.076	-0.039	-0.051
	(0.134)	(0.136)	(0.124)	(0.124)
Treated × Atheist	-0.093	-0.058	0.063	0.078
	(0.189)	(0.193)	(0.175)	(0.175)
Treated × Calvinist-Methodist	-0.014	0.025	0.110	0.131
	(0.195)	(0.197)	(0.179)	(0.179)
Treated × Protestant	-0.313	-0.312	-0.288	-0.276
	(0.192)	(0.194)	(0.176)	(0.176)
Observations	833	833	833	833
R2	0.099	0.137	0.295	0.298
Panel b: High Income				
Treated	0.079	0.083	-0.015	-0.036
	(0.165)	(0.173)	(0.156)	(0.156)
Treated × Atheist	0.105	0.079	0.195	0.224
	(0.253)	(0.271)	(0.245)	(0.245)
Treated × Calvinist-Methodist	0.016	0.005	0.094	0.116
	(0.241)	(0.250)	(0.226)	(0.225)
Treated × Protestant	-0.165	-0.190	-0.184	-0.178
	(0.238)	(0.246)	(0.223)	(0.222)
Observations	540	540	540	540
R2	0.100	0.150	0.314	0.320
Panel b: Low Income				
Treated	0.241	0.326	0.163	0.165
	(0.228)	(0.244)	(0.227)	(0.227)
Treated × Atheist	-0.401	-0.369	-0.221	-0.222
	(0.294)	(0.312)	(0.290)	(0.291)
Treated × Calvinist-Methodist	-0.153	-0.316	-0.257	-0.262
	(0.333)	(0.349)	(0.324)	(0.325)
Treated × Protestant	-0.668**	-0.801**	-0.770**	-0.772**
	(0.335)	(0.353)	(0.327)	(0.327)
Observations	293	293	293	293
R2	0.122	0.221	0.347	0.347
Mean Dep. Var.	4.071	4.071	4.071	4.071
Basic Controls	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Labour Market Controls	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Political Orientation Controls	No	No	Yes	Yes
Subjective Social Status	No	No	No	Yes

Notes: OLS Estimates. Basic controls are total approvals, gender, age, age squared, ethnicity, education, and marital status. Labor market controls include employment status. Standard errors in parentheses. *** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1

4.3 Evidence from the Integrated Value Survey

So far, we find an interesting relationship between religious narratives and inequality acceptance. Overall, our analysis suggests that religious narratives may be used to increase tolerance of inequality, and that, as such, they are mainly adopted by low-income individuals.

Although we believe this is an interesting result, we are aware of the limits of our study. Most of all, we focus on a limited sample, recruited from Prolific. Hence, we need to understand further whether our results can be generalized or not.

To this end, we investigate the relationship between religious affiliation and tolerance of inequality using data from the Integrated Value Survey (IVS) (WVS, 2022, European Values Study, 2022). The IVS comprises the European Value Study (EVS) and the World Value Survey (WVS), which are two large-scale, cross-national, and repeated cross-sectional longitudinal surveys widely used in the study of religion (see e.g. Purzycki et al., 2016, White et al., 2021).

We build on the seminal work by Alesina and Giuliano (2011) that shows the association between religious affiliation and preferences for redistribution. As in their work, we build our dependent variable on a question asking to agree or disagree on a 10-point scale with the following statement: "People should take more responsibility to provide for themselves (1) vs The government should take more responsibility to ensure that everyone is provided for (10)". We label this variable 'Gov. Resp.'. We also exploit a question asking to agree or disagree on a 10-point scale with the following statement: "Income should be made more equal (1) vs We need larger income differences as incentives". We label this variable 'More Ineq.'

As in our main specification, we focus on Atheists and Christians, using as a reference category individuals belonging to the Catholic Church, and we control for a large set of individual controls, including age, age squared, gender, education, employment, ethnicity, saving behavior, and household size. Summary statistics can be found in Table F1. To divide the sample by income level, we use a variable that indicates the income decile of the respondents' household. Individuals within the third decile are defined as low income, individuals between the fourth and the seventh deciles are defined as medium income, and individuals who are in the highest 2 deciles are defined as high-income.

The results are reported in Table 5 and are in line with our main analysis: Protestants are more likely to accept inequality when compared with Catholics; however, this difference is driven by low-income individuals. Specifically, a low-income protestant is 3% more likely to believe that income inequality is needed to increase incentives and 2% more likely to believe that people should take responsibility to ensure that everyone is provided for.

Overall, this evidence appears to suggest that the results of our experiment help explain an interesting and broader pattern: religiosity may affect people's view of inequality, but this is mostly true for low-income individuals.

Table 5: Inequality Acceptance (Integrated Value Survey)

	Low Income		Medium Income		High Income	
	More Ineq.	Gov. Resp.	More Ineq.	Gov. Resp.	More Ineq.	Gov. Resp.
Religion (ref: Roman Catholic):						
Do not belong to a denomination	-0.017	0.095	-0.052	0.091	-0.104	0.162
	(0.076)	(0.065)	(0.057)	(0.064)	(0.103)	(0.108)
Protestant	0.177***	-0.127**	0.056	0.009	0.141	0.020
	(0.065)	(0.059)	(0.061)	(0.115)	(0.105)	(0.088)
Orthodox	-0.089	0.132	0.017	0.258*	0.208	-0.021
	(0.147)	(0.211)	(0.145)	(0.134)	(0.221)	(0.197)
Other Christian	0.076	0.010	0.041	-0.097	0.142	0.132
	(0.252)	(0.130)	(0.102)	(0.112)	(0.297)	(0.184)
Basic Controls	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Labour Market Controls	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Survey Wave x Country FE	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Observations	26305	26305	44317	44317	10857	10857
R2	0.161	0.120	0.136	0.118	0.085	0.129

Notes: OLS Estimates. Basic controls are gender, age, age squared, ethnicity, education, and marital status. Labor market controls include employment status. Standard errors in parentheses. *** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1

5 Discussion

Our research shows that people respond to religious stories differently based on their material conditions: the influence of religious framing on economic preferences is significant mainly among low-income individuals, while it is mostly absent among those with higher income. This indicates that the moral and psychological effects of religious stories—such as those invoking divine blessings—are most relevant to people who face the greatest personal inequality. This pattern supports earlier theories suggesting that disadvantaged individuals are more likely to adopt legitimizing narratives that justify inequality within a moral framework. Our experiment supports this interpretation. When exposed to a "blessing" frame emphasizing divine favor, participants with lower incomes were more willing to accept wealth differences as deserved and less willing to redistribute. However, this effect does not apply equally across all denominations. When we consider the broad sense of Protestantism—covering the various confessions that emerged from the Reformation—the differences with Catholics follow the expected Weberian pattern but are not statistically significant. That is, while Protestants overall tend to see blessings as connected to a personal relationship with God and as signals of merit, this trend is too weak to be conclusive in quantitative terms.

In contrast, when focusing on the narrow definition of Protestantism, the results become clearer and statistically significant. Among low-income Protestants, exposure to the blessing narrative notably decreases the willingness to redistribute compared to low-income Catholics. This difference indicates that, for Protestants in the stricter sense, the blessing framing triggers a divinely inspired "just-world belief" (Furnham, 2003)—the idea that existing inequalities are not accidental but reflect divine justice. Among Catholics, however, the connection between the individual and God—mediated by the Church structure and sacramental practice—seems to weaken this effect, promoting a more collective view of moral responsibility. Survey data from the Integrated Values Survey (IVS, combining EVS and WVS) confirm this income-based pattern. Across countries and after adjusting for demographic and socioeconomic factors, Protestants demonstrate a higher acceptance of inequality and place more emphasis on personal responsibility compared to Catholics—but again, this difference is almost entirely due to the low-

income subgroup. In higher-income groups, religious affiliation has little measurable impact on attitudes toward redistribution or inequality. These converging pieces of evidence indicate that Weber's identified cultural mechanisms remain relevant, though only in specific socioeconomic contexts. The broad concept of the Protestant ethic can still serve as a helpful framework for understanding moral views on wealth, but Weber's hypothesis is most clearly supported within the narrow Protestant identity—especially among the economically disadvantaged. Religious stories, like other moral narratives (Hillenbrand and Verrina, 2022, Shiller, 2020), influence how people perceive fairness and effort, but their impact depends on the individual's material circumstances.

The limitations of our analysis emerged in our discussion. On the one hand, the specificity of our sample (Prolific workers, self-reporting religious identity) may be related to the statistical (non)significance of our results concerning the broader Protestant group. On the other hand, the religious confessions that constitute the US Protestant world are many more than the three we inquired about (see Steensland et al., 2000). While we focus on Protestants (narrowly speaking), Calvinists, and Methodists, we leave aside Evangelicals, Baptists, Non-Denominational Protestants, Pentecostals, Episcopalians/Anglicans, Adventists, Anabaptists, and others. Moreover, Weber was very clear in stating that the spirit of capitalism is a secularised version of the protestant ethic. This means that the economic impact of religious notions such as 'calling' or 'blessing' extended beyond the scope of established religions. In the US, this might also be connected to the fact that even certain Catholic spheres were indirectly impacted by the Weberian spirit of capitalism, as testified by many catholic authors such as Novak (1993), Gregg (2001), and Sirico (2012) who express very pro-free market society doctrines.

As often happens in this kind of study, our limitations constitute patterns for future research. The experiment might be extended both quantitatively and qualitatively (by including more religious confessions or comparing US believers to those in other countries). What is certain is that in a world of growing inequalities, the religious/spiritual component is a determinant that cannot be marginalized or ignored.

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Appendix A

Table A1: Summary Statistics

Variable	Mean	Std. Dev.	N
Atheist			
Kept	65.556	21.414	108
Guess	55.596	24.736	109
Inequality Too Large	0.912	0.283	217
Luck Most Important	0.226	0.419	217
Total Approvals	1557.472	1094.097	218
Female	0.5	0.501	218
Age	36.436	11.693	218
Full Time	0.472	0.5	218
White	0.784	0.412	218
Tertiary Education	0.505	0.501	218
Married or Civil Union	0.225	0.418	218
Republican	0.05	0.219	218
Household Income	7.037	3.875	218
Socioeconomic Status	4.509	1.812	218
Calvinist/Methodist			
Kept	65.083	22.158	96
Guess	56.98	24.859	99
Inequality Too Large	0.703	0.458	195
Luck Most Important	0.087	0.283	195
Total Approvals	1173.308	1064.889	195
Female	0.544	0.499	195
Age	41.093	14.526	193
Full Time	0.523	0.501	195
White	0.897	0.304	195
Tertiary Education	0.251	0.435	195
Married or Civil Union	0.672	0.471	195
Republican	0.354	0.479	195
Household Income	8.497	3.644	195
Socioeconomic Status	5.413	1.623	195
Catholics			
Kept	66.704	24.34	108
Guess	53.495	29.163	109
Inequality Too Large	0.747	0.436	217
Luck Most Important	0.101	0.303	217
Total Approvals	1887.028	1273.225	217
Female	0.502	0.501	217
Age	42.134	14.361	216
Full Time	0.636	0.482	217
White	0.839	0.369	217
Tertiary Education	0.207	0.406	217
Married or Civil Union	0.23	0.422	217
Republican	0.336	0.474	217
Household Income	8.189	3.477	217
Socioeconomic Status	5.452	1.661	217
Protestants			
Kept	67.226	25.794	106
Guess	54.752	25.737	101
Inequality Too Large	0.696	0.461	207
Luck Most Important	0.087	0.282	207
Total Approvals	2360.546	1825.083	207
Female	0.488	0.501	207
Age	43.807	12.891	207
Full Time	0.618	0.487	207
White	0.763	0.426	207
Tertiary Education	0.271	0.445	207
Married or Civil Union	0.773	0.42	207
Republican	0.329	0.471	207
Household Income	8.279	3.557	207
Socioeconomic Status	5.396	1.615	207

Table A2: Balanced Test

	Control	Treatment	Difference
Kept	64.400	67.952	3.552
	(23.381)	(23.436)	(2.290)
Guess	55.834	54.535	-1.299
	(25.525)	(26.804)	(2.562)
Ineq. Too Large	0.776	0.758	-0.018
	(0.417)	(0.429)	(0.029)
Luck most important	0.130	0.124	-0.007
	(0.337)	(0.329)	(0.023)
Total approvals	1,792.178	1,712.531	-79.648
	(1,376.436)	(1,449.521)	(97.737)
Female	0.516	0.500	-0.016
	(0.500)	(0.501)	(0.035)
Age	40.688	40.948	0.259
	(14.083)	(13.223)	(0.946)
Full-time employment	0.557	0.569	0.012
	(0.497)	(0.496)	(0.034)
White	0.814	0.825	0.010
	(0.389)	(0.381)	(0.027)
Tertiary education	0.311	0.310	-0.000
	(0.463)	(0.463)	(0.032)
Married/Civil union	0.434	0.498	0.064*
	(1.553)	(1.677)	(0.112)
Republican	0.282	0.246	-0.035
	(0.450)	(0.431)	(0.030)
Household income	7.889	8.076	0.187
	(3.570)	(3.788)	(0.255)
Socioeconomic status	5.167	5.199	0.032
	(1.783)	(1.671)	(0.119)
Observations	415	422	837

Appendix B

Table B1: Effect of Blessing (Dictators)

	Keep	Keep	Keep	Keep
Treated	2.915	2.205	2.675	2.697
	(4.434)	(4.587)	(4.568)	(4.574)
Religion (ref: Catholic):				
Atheist	-0.400	-3.225	-0.710	-0.958
	(4.476)	(5.703)	(5.768)	(5.833)
Calvinist	1.473	4.905	3.792	3.882
	(4.629)	(10.985)	(11.001)	(11.019)
Protestant	-0.247	6.327	4.095	4.235
	(4.515)	(11.473)	(11.478)	(11.502)
Interaction Effects:				
Treated × Atheist	-0.684	-0.562	-1.330	-1.362
	(6.268)	(6.430)	(6.403)	(6.412)
Treated × Calvinist-Methodist	0.268	1.041	-0.299	-0.363
	(6.529)	(6.655)	(6.654)	(6.666)
Treated × Protestant	1.559	1.604	0.185	0.204
	(6.349)	(6.497)	(6.491)	(6.499)
Total Approvals and Demographics:				
Total approvals	0.003***	0.002***	0.002**	0.002**
	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)
Sex	5.072**	3.163	3.655	3.660
	(2.321)	(2.462)	(2.473)	(2.476)
Age	-0.194	-0.410	-0.425	-0.445
	(0.506)	(0.570)	(0.568)	(0.572)
Age^2	-0.001	0.002	0.002	0.002
	(0.006)	(0.006)	(0.006)	(0.006)
Ethnicity (ref: White):				
Asian	.	3.076	2.924	2.885
	.	(4.659)	(4.690)	(4.698)
Black	.	3.466	4.664	4.574
	.	(4.879)	(4.994)	(5.009)
Mixed	.	-2.836	-3.037	-3.107
	.	(5.549)	(5.532)	(5.543)
Other	.	-8.819	-9.787	-9.900
	.	(6.855)	(6.876)	(6.894)
Education (ref: Doctorate degree):				
Graduate degree	.	9.956	9.646	9.483
	.	(8.221)	(8.203)	(8.231)
High school diploma/A-levels	.	4.453	4.145	3.868
	.	(8.989)	(8.981)	(9.039)
No formal qualifications	.	0.092	-2.086	-2.497
	.	(15.701)	(15.821)	(15.898)
Secondary education (e.g. GED/GCSE)	.	-2.153	-1.507	-1.851
	.	(8.539)	(8.495)	(8.581)
Technical/community college	.	8.778	8.967	8.764
	.	(7.989)	(7.956)	(7.994)
Undergraduate degree (BA/BSc/other)	.	7.810	7.638	7.562
	.	(9.335)	(9.306)	(9.321)
Marital Status (ref: Married):				
Divorced	.	-0.118	0.316	0.023
	.	(6.377)	(6.343)	(6.424)
Engaged	.	-0.359	0.485	0.159
	.	(7.242)	(7.210)	(7.299)
In a civil partnership/civil union or similar	.	0.152	0.677	0.561
	.	(6.168)	(6.143)	(6.163)
In a relationship	.	9.026**	9.037**	8.966**
	.	(4.087)	(4.105)	(4.117)
Never married	.	9.420	11.640	11.396
	.	(7.971)	(8.019)	(8.070)
Rather Not Say	.	2.692	2.942	2.819
	.	(4.608)	(4.592)	(4.616)
Separated	.	-7.160	-9.963	-10.278
	.	(14.072)	(14.062)	(14.118)
Single	.	6.516	6.175	6.180
	.	(5.415)	(5.399)	(5.405)
Employment Status (ref: Due to start a new job):				
Full-Time	.	-27.443**	-29.489**	-29.233**
	.	(13.528)	(13.546)	(13.589)
Not in paid work (e.g. homemaker, retired, or disabled)	.	-29.179**	-29.993**	-29.866**
	.	(13.915)	(13.925)	(13.949)
Other	.	-31.816**	-33.182**	-33.197**
	.	(14.573)	(14.587)	(14.605)
Part-Time	.	-34.515**	-36.303***	-36.104***
	.	(13.888)	(13.894)	(13.927)
Unemployed (and job seeking)	.	-32.787**	-35.731**	-35.765**
	.	(14.032)	(14.073)	(14.091)
Political Affiliation (ref: Democrat):				
Independent	.	.	-1.568	-1.531
	.	.	(2.854)	(2.860)
None	.	.	8.998	9.041
	.	.	(7.892)	(7.903)
Other	.	.	-3.421	-3.382
	.	.	(9.174)	(9.186)
Republican	.	.	6.483**	6.535**
	.	.	(3.104)	(3.113)
Socioeconomic status	.	.	.	-0.230
	.	.	.	(0.761)
Observations	416	416	416	416
R-squared	0.069	0.160	0.179	0.179

Notes: OLS Estimates. Basic controls are total approvals, gender, age, age squared, ethnicity, education, and marital status. Labor market controls include employment status. Standard errors in parentheses. *** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1

Table B2: Effect of Blessing (Recipients)

	Guess	Guess	Guess	Guess
Treated	-6.070	-7.003	-6.387	-6.322
	(5.000)	(5.159)	(5.208)	(5.227)
Religion (ref: Catholic):				
Atheist	-1.619	-4.215	-2.604	-2.473
	(5.188)	(6.448)	(6.605)	(6.654)
Calvinist	0.719	3.924	6.111	6.374
	(5.159)	(15.567)	(15.739)	(15.829)
Protestant	-5.072	-6.613	-3.549	-3.334
	(5.183)	(15.933)	(16.166)	(16.232)
Interaction Effects:				
Treated × Atheist	4.184	4.338	3.385	3.319
	(7.081)	(7.344)	(7.407)	(7.427)
Treated × Calvinist-Methodist	7.288	6.449	6.342	6.202
	(7.239)	(7.383)	(7.422)	(7.473)
Treated × Protestant	9.361	9.494	9.176	9.143
	(7.225)	(7.361)	(7.384)	(7.396)
Total Approvals and Demographics:				
Total approvals	0.003***	0.002**	0.002**	0.002**
	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)
Sex	1.257	1.937	1.568	1.564
	(2.577)	(2.724)	(2.793)	(2.796)
Age	-0.438	-0.885	-0.954	-0.949
	(0.605)	(0.652)	(0.655)	(0.657)
Age^2	0.002	0.006	0.007	0.007
	(0.007)	(0.007)	(0.007)	(0.007)
Ethnicity (ref: White):				
Asian	.	3.156	3.025	3.048
	.	(6.674)	(6.709)	(6.719)
Black	.	3.039	2.640	2.477
	.	(7.317)	(7.501)	(7.567)
Mixed	.	1.670	0.602	0.534
	.	(8.028)	(8.132)	(8.152)
Other	.	0.759	1.511	1.426
	.	(9.641)	(9.705)	(9.729)
Chinese	.	0.000	0.000	0.000
	.	(.)	(.)	(.)
Education (ref: Doctorate degree):				
Graduate degree	.	-17.959**	-19.154**	-18.989**
	.	(7.862)	(7.958)	(8.022)
High school diploma/A-levels	.	-11.422	-12.219	-11.946
	.	(8.031)	(8.097)	(8.251)
No formal qualifications	.	-8.824	-11.338	-10.936
	.	(12.728)	(12.902)	(13.116)
Secondary education (e.g. GED/GCSE)	.	-2.461	-2.789	-2.561
	.	(8.250)	(8.317)	(8.425)
Technical/community college	.	-13.699*	-14.580*	-14.489*
	.	(7.369)	(7.424)	(7.452)
Undergraduate degree (BA/BSc/other)	.	-12.251	-12.714	-12.643
	.	(8.881)	(8.972)	(8.992)
Marital Status (ref: Married):				
Divorced	.	-3.758	-3.987	-3.894
	.	(6.971)	(7.001)	(7.030)
Engaged	.	2.551	1.302	1.444
	.	(7.377)	(7.443)	(7.496)
In a civil partnership/civil union or similar	.	-0.560	-1.424	-1.364
	.	(6.241)	(6.287)	(6.304)
In a relationship	.	-2.041	-2.126	-2.084
	.	(4.711)	(4.732)	(4.745)
Never married	.	-2.126	-2.135	-2.044
	.	(8.053)	(8.078)	(8.105)
Rather Not Say	.	-14.202**	-14.063**	-13.926**
	.	(5.651)	(5.687)	(5.746)
Separated	.	-8.731	-8.479	-8.287
	.	(10.170)	(10.198)	(10.268)
Single	.	-2.083	-2.980	-2.891
	.	(5.980)	(6.029)	(6.058)
Employment Status (ref: Due to start a new job):				
Full-Time	.	5.250	4.958	4.693
	.	(26.351)	(26.475)	(26.552)
Not in paid work (e.g. homemaker, retired, or disabled)	.	-1.347	-1.953	-2.102
	.	(26.465)	(26.588)	(26.636)
Other	.	3.910	4.142	4.057
	.	(27.332)	(27.464)	(27.505)
Part-Time	.	-0.284	-0.338	-0.512
	.	(26.522)	(26.630)	(26.682)
Unemployed (and job seeking)	.	-1.448	-2.056	-2.234
	.	(26.574)	(26.718)	(26.771)
Political Affiliation (ref: Democrat):				
Independent	.	.	0.632	0.670
	.	.	(3.407)	(3.418)
None	.	.	8.927	9.012
	.	.	(7.724)	(7.749)
Other	.	.	-4.751	-4.710
	.	.	(8.939)	(8.954)
Republican	.	.	2.652	2.576
	.	.	(3.508)	(3.539)
Socioeconomic status	.	.	.	0.156
	.	.	.	(0.876)
Observations	417	417	417	417
R-squared	0.042	0.138	0.143	0.144

Notes: OLS Estimates. Basic controls are total approvals, gender, age, age squared, ethnicity, education, and marital status. Labor market controls include employment status. Standard errors in parentheses. *** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1

Table B3: Effect of Blessing on Opinions

	Ineq. Too Large	Ineq. Too Large	Ineq. Too Large	Ineq. Too Large
Treated	0.113	0.076	-0.039	-0.051
	(0.134)	(0.136)	(0.124)	(0.124)
Religion (ref: Catholic):				
Atheist	0.609***	0.683***	0.389**	0.346**
	(0.136)	(0.170)	(0.156)	(0.158)
Calvinist	-0.015	-0.003	0.082	0.056
	(0.139)	(0.346)	(0.313)	(0.313)
Protestant	0.122	0.179	0.296	0.278
	(0.137)	(0.357)	(0.324)	(0.323)
Interaction Effects:				
Treated × Atheist	-0.093	-0.058	0.063	0.078
	(0.189)	(0.193)	(0.175)	(0.175)
Treated × Calvinist-Methodist	-0.014	0.025	0.110	0.131
	(0.195)	(0.197)	(0.179)	(0.179)
Treated × Protestant	-0.313	-0.312	-0.288	-0.276
	(0.192)	(0.194)	(0.176)	(0.176)
Total Approvals and Demographics:				
Total approvals	-0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000
	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)
Sex	-0.194***	-0.181**	-0.070	-0.068
	(0.069)	(0.072)	(0.066)	(0.066)
Age	0.003	-0.003	-0.002	-0.005
	(0.016)	(0.017)	(0.015)	(0.015)
Age^2	-0.000	-0.000	-0.000	-0.000
	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)
Ethnicity (ref: White):				
Asian	.	0.117	-0.026	-0.032
	.	(0.154)	(0.140)	(0.140)
Black	.	0.130	-0.249	-0.246
	.	(0.164)	(0.152)	(0.152)
Mixed	.	0.062	0.043	0.044
	.	(0.183)	(0.166)	(0.166)
Other	.	0.151	0.189	0.184
	.	(0.226)	(0.205)	(0.205)
Chinese	.	0.000	0.000	0.000
	.	(.)	(.)	(.)
Education (ref: Doctorate degree):				
Graduate degree	.	-0.450**	-0.365*	-0.399*
	.	(0.225)	(0.204)	(0.204)
High school diploma/A-levels	.	-0.294	-0.311	-0.370*
	.	(0.238)	(0.216)	(0.218)
No formal qualifications	.	-0.623	-0.637*	-0.744**
	.	(0.382)	(0.350)	(0.353)
Secondary education (e.g. GED/GCSE)	.	-0.450*	-0.381*	-0.438**
	.	(0.236)	(0.214)	(0.216)
Technical/community college	.	-0.285	-0.243	-0.272
	.	(0.215)	(0.195)	(0.196)
Undergraduate degree (BA/BSc/other)	.	-0.284	-0.298	-0.314
	.	(0.255)	(0.232)	(0.231)
Marital Status (ref: Married):				
Divorced	.	0.118	0.170	0.132
	.	(0.187)	(0.170)	(0.170)
Engaged	.	0.039	0.108	0.060
	.	(0.203)	(0.185)	(0.186)
In a civil partnership/civil union or similar	.	-0.247	-0.207	-0.227
	.	(0.173)	(0.157)	(0.157)
In a relationship	.	-0.138	-0.143	-0.158
	.	(0.123)	(0.112)	(0.112)
Never married	.	-0.142	-0.281	-0.308
	.	(0.224)	(0.204)	(0.204)
Rather Not Say	.	-0.075	-0.104	-0.131
	.	(0.143)	(0.130)	(0.131)
Separated	.	-0.438	-0.338	-0.394
	.	(0.319)	(0.289)	(0.290)
Single	.	-0.367**	-0.352**	-0.364**
	.	(0.160)	(0.146)	(0.145)
Employment Status (ref: Due to start a new job):				
Full-Time	.	-0.698	-0.286	-0.242
	.	(0.499)	(0.453)	(0.453)
Not in paid work (e.g. homemaker, retired, or disabled)	.	-0.652	-0.323	-0.309
	.	(0.505)	(0.459)	(0.458)
Other	.	-0.735	-0.292	-0.293
	.	(0.529)	(0.481)	(0.480)
Part-Time	.	-0.547	-0.077	-0.050
	.	(0.507)	(0.461)	(0.460)
Unemployed (and job seeking)	.	-0.672	-0.161	-0.156
	.	(0.509)	(0.463)	(0.462)
Political Affiliation (ref: Democrat):				
Independent	.	.	-0.500***	-0.502***
	.	.	(0.080)	(0.079)
None	.	.	-0.322	-0.327*
	.	.	(0.196)	(0.196)
Other	.	.	-0.433*	-0.437*
	.	.	(0.228)	(0.228)
Republican	.	.	-1.116***	-1.103***
	.	.	(0.084)	(0.084)
Socioeconomic status	.	.	.	-0.040**
	.	.	.	(0.021)
Observations	833	833	833	833
R-squared	0.099	0.137	0.295	0.298

Notes: OLS Estimates. Basic controls are total approvals, gender, age, age squared, ethnicity, education, and marital status. Labor market controls include employment status. Standard errors in parentheses. *** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1

Appendix C

Table C1: Tobit Model

Dependent Variables:	Keep Full Sample	Guess Full Sample	Keep High Income	Guess High Income	Keep Low Income	Guess Low Income
Treated	1.916	-7.143	5.310	5.403	-6.907	-9.808
	(5.751)	(5.788)	(7.353)	(7.244)	(8.879)	(9.362)
Treated × Atheist	0.265	3.627	-2.064	-14.157	10.350	8.564
	(8.033)	(8.210)	(11.550)	(11.034)	(10.753)	(12.430)
Treated × Calvinist-Methodist	0.739	8.005	5.189	-7.862	-3.652	12.496
	(8.342)	(8.258)	(11.018)	(9.858)	(11.723)	(14.672)
Treated × Protestant	1.943	9.626	-12.961	-10.265	45.212***	27.562**
	(8.218)	(8.169)	(10.599)	(10.386)	(12.779)	(13.396)
Basic Controls	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Labour Market Controls	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Political Orientation Controls	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Subjective Social Status	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Observations	416	417	274	266	142	151
Uncensored Observations	309	353	192	222	117	131

Notes: Tobit Estimates. Basic controls are total approvals, gender, age, age squared, ethnicity, education, and marital status. Labor market controls include employment status. Standard errors in parentheses. *** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1

Table C2: Religious Participation

Dependent Variables:	Keep Full Sample	Guess Full Sample	Ineq. too Large Full Sample	Keep High Income	Guess High Income	Ineq. too Large High Income	Keep Low Income	Guess Low Income	Ineq. too Large Low Income
Treated	3.161	-4.502	-0.052	6.727	4.987	-0.094	-6.738	-7.849	0.275
	(4.837)	(5.166)	(0.133)	(6.173)	(6.841)	(0.170)	(9.134)	(10.097)	(0.240)
Treated × Calvinist and Meth.	-2.505	4.884	0.122	-1.330	-8.763	0.151	0.206	10.176	-0.520
	(7.004)	(7.365)	(0.192)	(9.188)	(9.222)	(0.243)	(12.552)	(16.538)	(0.346)
Treated × Protestants	1.047	10.261	-0.241	-11.136	-5.016	-0.033	36.031**	19.397	-0.863**
	(6.815)	(7.305)	(0.189)	(8.725)	(9.874)	(0.242)	(13.591)	(14.268)	(0.345)
Basic Controls	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Labour Market Controls	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Political Orientation Controls	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Subjective Social Status	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Religious Participation	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Observations	308	308	616	216	209	425	92	99	191

Notes: Tobit Estimates. Basic controls are total approvals, gender, age, age squared, ethnicity, education, and marital status. Labor market controls include employment status. Standard errors in parentheses. *** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1

Appendix D

Table D1: Effect of Blessing HH Income Interaction (Dictators)

	Keep	Keep	Keep	Keep
Treated × Atheist × Household Income	-1.349	-1.415	-1.217	-1.169
	(1.818)	(1.854)	(1.848)	(1.850)
Treated × Calvinist-Methodist × Household Income	1.659	0.708	0.725	0.783
	(1.918)	(1.960)	(1.954)	(1.957)
Treated × Protestant × Household Income	-3.897**	-4.226**	-4.030**	-4.022**
	(1.893)	(1.985)	(1.981)	(1.982)
Basic Controls	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Labour Market Controls	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Political Orientation Controls	No	No	Yes	Yes
Subjective Social Status	No	No	No	Yes
Observations	416	416	416	416
R-squared	0.099	0.185	0.202	0.203

Notes: OLS Estimates. Basic controls are total approvals, gender, age, age squared, ethnicity, education, and marital status. Labor market controls include employment status. Standard errors in parentheses. *** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1

Table D2: Effect of Blessing HH Income Interaction (Recipients)

	Guess	Guess	Guess	Guess
Treated × Atheist × Household Income	-3.437*	-3.586*	-3.472*	-3.433*
	(1.910)	(2.015)	(2.043)	(2.046)
Treated × Calvinist-Methodist × Household Income	-1.171	-1.809	-1.812	-1.694
	(1.989)	(2.064)	(2.085)	(2.100)
Treated × Protestant × Household Income	-5.045**	-5.891***	-5.836***	-5.764***
	(2.023)	(2.111)	(2.125)	(2.132)
Basic Controls	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Labour Market Controls	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Political Orientation Controls	No	No	Yes	Yes
Subjective Social Status	No	No	No	Yes
Observations	417	417	417	417
R-squared	0.065	0.164	0.168	0.169

Notes: OLS Estimates. Basic controls are total approvals, gender, age, age squared, ethnicity, education, and marital status. Labor market controls include employment status. Standard errors in parentheses. *** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1

Table D3: Effect of Blessing Household Income Interaction (Opinios)

	Ineq. Too Large	Ineq. Too Large	Ineq. Too Large	Ineq. Too Large
Treated × Atheist × Household Income	0.064	0.042	0.024	0.024
	(0.052)	(0.054)	(0.049)	(0.049)
Treated × Calvinist-Methodist × Household Income	0.028	0.022	0.011	0.010
	(0.055)	(0.056)	(0.051)	(0.051)
Treated × Protestant × Household Income	0.092*	0.093*	0.077	0.077
	(0.055)	(0.056)	(0.051)	(0.051)
Basic Controls	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Labour Market Controls	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Political Orientation Controls	No	No	Yes	Yes
Subjective Social Status	No	No	No	Yes
Observations	833	833	833	833
R-squared	0.116	0.160	0.309	0.310

Notes: OLS Estimates. Basic controls are total approvals, gender, age, age squared, ethnicity, education, and marital status. Labor market controls include employment status. Standard errors in parentheses. *** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1

Appendix E

Table E1: Summary of Most Frequent Words Characterizing Each Dominant Topic

Topic	Most Frequent Words
Fortune and Luck	1. Something 2. Lucky 3. Given 4. Fortunate 5. Religious 6. Someone 7. Person 8. Life 9. Others 10. Mean
Life Satisfaction and Positivity	1. Life 2. Things 3. Happy 4. Need 5. Good 6. Feel 7. Family 8. People 9. Everything 10. Grateful
Good Fortune and Luck	1. Good 2. Things 3. Life 4. Luck 5. Fortune 6. Something 7. Happen 8. People 9. Like 10. Health
General Well-being	1. Family 2. Life 3. Good 4. Friends 5. Able 6. Love 7. Money 8. Health 9. Also 10. People
Spiritual Blessings	1. God 2. Things 3. Life 4. Blessings 5. Good 6. Favor 7. Blessing 8. Gods 9. Something 10. Given

Appendix F

Table F1: Summary statistics

Variable	Mean	Std. Dev.	Min.	Max.
More Inequality	5.655	2.969	1	10
Government Resp.	6.071	2.983	1	10
Age	41.401	16.175	15	99
Num. Children	1.693	1.481	0	5
Resp Chief Household	0.471	0.499	0	1
Save Money	0.289	0.453	0	1
No Relig Denom.	0.269	0.443	0	1
Roman Catholic	0.355	0.479	0	1
Protestant	0.193	0.395	0	1
Orthodox	0.155	0.362	0	1
Other Christians	0.027	0.162	0	1
Married	0.533	0.499	0	1
Female	0.514	0.5	0	1
Full-time Emp.	0.394	0.489	0	1
Age Completed Edu	19.503	4.982	1	31
Income	4.77	2.328	1	10
Observations		81608		