Pierre Bourdieu and the sociology of religion: A central and peripheral concern[1]

ERWAN DIANTEILL
École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales
*(*Andrew Wallis, *translator, Whittier College)*

Abstract. Although some of Bourdieu's most basic concepts have their roots in the sociology of religion, religion itself has, in appearance, only a marginalized status within his work. This article focuses on the genesis of religious field and how the theories of Durkheim, Mauss, and Weber fold into the notion of field defined by Bourdieu. Religious field must be understood within the symbolic economy as well; divisions of symbolic labor are therefore discussed in relation to segmented and non-segmented societies. Finally, Bourdieu's analysis of institutions, in particular the Catholic Church, further help us understand the use and evolution of religious field in his work and shed light on the sociologist's understanding of the movement from religious beliefs toward aesthetic ones.

Religion has the status of a "paradoxical object" in the work of Pierre Bourdieu. The articles that address the topic directly are very few in number, and none of his major works tackles this subject. Compared to the sociology of art, culture, or education, the study of power or social deprivation, the sociology of religion occupies a marginal space within the Bourdieu corpus. Yet certain of his most important concepts come out of the social sciences of religion. Inherited from Mauss or Durkheim, the concept of *belief*, which is a condition of existence of any *field*, is a manifest example. Even the elaboration of this latter concept, according to Bourdieu, springs from intermeshing research on the sociology of art begun around 1960 and the "beginning of the chapter devoted to religious sociology in *Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft*"[2] by Weber. He writes: "I constructed the notion of field both *against* Weber and *with* Weber, by thinking about the analysis he proposes of the relations between priest, prophet and sorcerer."[3] Another example can be found in the reading of Erwin Panofsky's *Gothic Architecture and Scholasticism* in which Bourdieu forged the definition of *habitus*. Indeed, in 1967, Bourdieu translates this text, one chapter of which is dedicated to "the habit-forming force" in the case of education and the

Theory and Society **32**: 529–549, 2003.

common culture of Catholic clerics and the architects of the cathedrals around Paris. The homology of structure between medieval philosophy and gothic architecture originates according to Panofsky within a common *habitus*. In the epilogue written by Bourdieu, one finds for one of the first times in his work an explicit definition of *habitus:*[4]

> A system of schema [that] constantly orient choices, which, though not deliberate, are nonetheless systematic; which, without being arranged and organized expressly according to an ultimate end, are nonetheless imbued with a sort of finality that reveals itself only *post festum*.[5]

Habitus is thus defined as a "system of thought schemes, of perception and of action," a "*modus operandi*."[6] This last expression, coming directly from scholastic philosophy, is taken up again in a little-known text[7] in which Bourdieu makes a complete diagram of the oppositions among objectivism, subjectivism, and his own "theory of practice." He defines the "*modus operandi*" (*habitus*) as the very object of sociology itself and it is as such that he intends to undertake its study. It is therefore inside the history of medieval art and philosophy impregnated with Catholicism that the French sociologist finds the model for one of his principal concepts. In Bourdieu's work, the notions of "belief," "field," or "*habitus*" always result from the social sciences of religion (sociology, anthropology, and history). From this point of view, Bourdieu's work is almost a "generalized" sociology of religion (with religion presenting in paradigmatic fashion properties common to all spheres of symbolic activity). In this perspective, David Swartz clearly shows to what extent Bourdieu's sociology of culture is a tributary of the sociology of religion.[8]

The goal of this article is to present Bourdieu's contribution to the social sciences of religion while concurrently reading his anthropological and sociological corpus. Can one speak of "religion" in societies in which institutional religions do not exist or are exceptionally weakened? Does the notion of religious field remain pertinent in non-segmented or increasingly secular societies? Or, in other words, is the "religious" limited to the religious field?

The study of Bourdieu's works suggests negative responses to these questions. The sociological validity of the concept of religious field is limited by the absence of a monopoly of symbolic production in certain agrarian societies on the one hand, and the growing uncertainty about the limits of field on the other. This latter is notably due to the appearance of new professions specializing in the "symbolic work"

and to the "de-coupling" of belief and institutional allegiance. In Bourdieu's ethnographic enterprise, it appears that the symbolic informs the entirety of social life without the existence of an autonomous institution that would allow for a "religious field."[9] What then forms the institutional space of religion from a social space that possesses little differentiation?[10] In fact, religious field seems to correspond precisely to the historic occidental religions, notably the Judaism and Catholicism analyzed in the dialectic between internal and external relations, and a certain "dissolution of the religious" that can be observed in occidental societies today.[11] I return in the conclusion to the paradox cited earlier whose elucidation exposes the limits of Bourdieu's sociology of religion: why, when the study of religious acts is at the heart of his principal concepts, does religion occupy such a marginal space within his work?

The social genesis of the religious field

According to Bourdieu, three major sociological theories of religion exist, symbolized by three names: Marx, Weber, and Durkheim. These theories seem mutually exclusive. It therefore becomes a question of "situating oneself in the geometric space of different perspectives, that is to say, in the point that allows for perception of what can and cannot be perceived from each point of view."[12] What thought processes remain from these three perspectives? Durkheim's contribution is explicitly expressed by Bourdieu while Marx's and Weber's seem less clearly distinguishable.

From Durkheim's *Elementary Forms of The Religious Life*, Bourdieu retains the idea that the sociology of religion must be considered as a dimension of the sociology of knowledge. Religion is an instrument both of communication and knowledge; it allows for harmony between the meaning of signs and the meaning of the world. It has for function the *logical and social integration* of "collective representations" and, in particular, that of religious "forms of classification."[13]

Weber's contribution to the sociology of religious field is decisive, because it lays the groundwork for escaping from the sterile alternative arising between religious subjectivism and unmediated Marxist reductionism.[14] Also from Weber comes the idea that the sociology of religion is a dimension of the sociology of power; mythic discourse must be attached to the religious interest of those who produce,

disseminate, and receive it. A historical genesis exists for the specialized religious bodies, the clerics, constituting the foundation of the religious field's relative autonomy. These religious professionals have strategies for obtaining a monopoly of hierocratic constraint, of the goods of salvation. The religious field therefore appears as the complete system of positions between religious agents, their objective competitive relations or their transactions.[15]

Finally, it seems that Bourdieu keeps Marx's notion of ideology as a "transfiguration of social rapports into supernatural rapports, thus inscribed in the nature of things and justified by them."[16] Religion assumes, in this perspective, a *political* function of conserving social order. It is difficult to differentiate between Marx's and Weber's influence to the extent that both place the sociology of religion within the confines of political and economic sociology.

In *The Logic of Practice*, arguments about magic are especially close to the Durkheimian problematic and are even more precisely Maussian. In "Genesis and structure of the religious field," Marx and Weber dominate.

The omnipresent symbolic in agrarian societies: *The Logic of Practice*

In *The Logic of Practice*, a synthesis of Bourdieu's anthropological works, "religion" is less an issue than rituals, magic, institutions of magic, and illocutionary force, and particular cases of symbolic power (the word "religion" is notably absent from the thematic index as is the word "symbol"). Kabyle society, organized around agricultural jobs and a limited number of craft activities (such as weaving, a specifically female occupation), is not familiar with autonomous clerics, but it is integrally structured by the "demon of analogy," a system of schemas constituted by binary oppositions whose initial partition "counterposes male and female, dry and wet, hot or cold…."[17] Close to the structuralism of Lévi-Strauss in the analysis of logical principles organizing "savage thought,"[18] Bourdieu distances himself from it through his enhanced attention to the incorporated dispositions, which generate symbolic practices that are *imperfectly systematic.*

According to him, one can completely understand "all the practices and ritual symbols on the basis of two operational schemes which, being natural processes culturally constituted in and through ritual

practice, are indissolubly logical and biological, like the natural processes they aim to reproduce (in both senses) when they are conceived in terms of magical logic. On the one hand, there is the reuniting of separated contraries, of which marriage, plowing and quenching are exemplary cases, and which engenders life, as the realized reunion of contraries; and, on the other hand, there is the separation of reunited contraries, with, for example, the sacrifice of the ox and harvesting, enacted as denied murders."[19] Yet if the logic of ritual calls for joining or separating contraries, it also requires that the transgressions they objectively signify be made socially acceptable.

Magic thus functions as a collective denial of necessary acts of transgression (joining the disjointed or splitting the unified). Without these, the separated contraries would remain sterile. Transgression allows for the reproduction of the vital order, the reproduction of the group, but it is excessively dangerous and requires therefore a collective construction, public and practical, denying the objective meaning of rite. How can the contrary exigencies be ritually reconciled? The practical meaning at work in the legitimate magic of rites, which makes symbolic acts of transgression acceptable, is in fact a *double meaning*: affirmation of unity in the separation of contraries; affirmation of the separation in their unification. The joining of contradictory principles can only be realized in authorization accorded circularly to the group and by the group at the moment of the ritual:

> The whole truth of collective magic and belief is contained in this game of two-fold objective truth, a double game played with truth, through which the group, the source of all objectivity, in a sense lies to itself by producing a truth whose sole function and meaning are to deny a truth known and recognized by all, a lie that would deceive no one, were not everyone determined to be mistaken…. In the case of the harvest, the social truth to be collectively denied is unambiguous: harvesting (*thamegra*) is a murder (*thamgert*, designates the throat, violent death, revenge; and *amgar*, the sickle), through which the earth, fertilized by ploughing, is stripped of the fruits it has brought to maturity.[20]

In Kabyle social life, rites of licitation that imply a (denied) solution of continuity are balanced by propitiatory rites. Their logic is one of "management" of the antagonism that threatens the natural and social order. They permit the transition between opposing principles, in particular the trouble-free passage from one period of the year to another: the feminization of the masculine in autumn, the masculinization of the feminine in spring, summer and winter being symbolically purely masculine and feminine.

In *The Logic of Practice*, the heuristic value of the distinction made between magic and religion is denied, for this opposition must be understood as the stakes of a symbolic struggle that has nothing to do with Kabyle society. Use of the term "magic" aims to disqualify, in segmented societies, the symbolic practices of the dominated, the dominators reserving for themselves the term "religion." These categories are inseparable from the creation of a religious field, with its competing stakes among priests, sorcerers, and prophets in Europe and the Near East. They are not relevant in societies with little segmentation. Bourdieu writes: "The institution of licit (*lah'lal*) periods or moments, the mandating of persons who serve as 'screens' (the family charged with opening the plowing, inaugural parallel-cousin marriages, etc.) and the organization of major collective ceremonies in which the group authorizes itself, are three aspects of the same operation, which is essential to all legitimate ritual (one confuses everything by identifying the distinction between legitimate and illegitimate magic with the – socially contested – distinction between religion and magic). The authority the group grants itself, either as a whole or in the person of one of its mandated members, is the basis of the illocutionary force at work in all social rituals."[21]

The preceding analysis exhibits accents that are clearly Maussian. Magic has a social foundation – *belief* – and a social efficiency that are associated with it: "In definitive," writes Mauss, "it is always society that pays itself in the forged money of its dream. The synthesis of the cause and effect only occurs in public opinion.... We should consider magic as a system of *a priori* inductions, used under the pressure of need by groups of individuals."[22] Likewise, magic, for Mauss and Hubert, is "at once an *opus operatum* in terms of the magic and an *opus inoperans* in terms of technique."[23] This same idea is taken up and generalized by Bourdieu: "The specifically magic character of this completely social force is invisible so long as it is exercised only on the social world, separating or uniting individuals or groups with frontiers or bonds (marriage) no less magic than those instituted by the knife or the knot in magic, transmuting the social value of things (like the fashion designer's label) or persons (like the educational qualification). On the other hand, it appears quite openly when, in a kind of innocence, confidence, abandonment imposed by extreme distress and disarray, groups attempt to use the power that they give themselves, in one of the circular operations which are the basis of the entirely efficacious magic of the collective, beyond its limits of validity, that is, on the natural world that does not depend on the group but on which the group depends."[24]

In summary, Bourdieu's anthropological works stress the social conditions of rite efficiency outside the religious field, which is absent from Kabyle society. There are no institutionalized intermediaries (it would seem) between the group and itself: there of course exist families responsible for cutting the first wheat sheaves of the harvest, for example, but this function is not constant. The religious institutions whose genesis and structure Bourdieu studies play an entirely different social role.

The constitution of religious institutions: "Genesis and structure of the religious field"

Bourdieu's sociology of religion is, first and foremost, a sociology of Catholicism. The accent thus falls on the process of monopolization of power by a single institution: The Catholic Church. From this point of view, the highest concentration of hierocratic power is reached in Western Europe before the Reformation. It is the genesis of this monopolization that most interests Bourdieu. The question of competition between clerics, new and old, comes in second to inquiries about the emergence of a central religious power within Christianity. This modern competition is, on the contrary, of great importance to North American sociology, which often focuses on religious pluralism, processes of fusion and division of denominations, and religious individualism, the federal government guaranteeing religious freedom and refusing all support to a single religion ever since the eighteenth century. From this point of view, Bourdieu's sociology of religion clearly depends on a particular social situation, namely the existence in France of a quasi-monopolistic religion that has maintained organic links with the state for several centuries.

To explain this process of concentration, the French sociologist gets his inspiration largely from Max Weber's works on ancient Judaism and the emergence of Christianity. For Bourdieu, the "separation of intellectual labor and material labor" is at the origin of two intimately linked processes that can be qualified as subjective and objective: the creation of religious field on one hand, and, on the other, the process of rationalization of beliefs and rites. In the footsteps of Max Weber, Bourdieu recalls how closely tied religious conduct is to the natural vicissitudes of rural life for the peasantry, whereas urbanization encourages a "rationalization" and "moralization of religious needs relatively independent from natural conditions.[25] What is more, urbani-

zation promotes the development of a corps of professionals dealing with salvation goods. City clergy contribute to the internalization of faith, to the introduction of ethical criteria – of "good" and "evil," the notion of "sin" – at least in the Judeo-Christian context. To the conjunction of priests' interests with those of certain categories of urban laity can also be attributed the domination of monotheism in Palestine, and in Jerusalem in particular.

The two preceding processes have several correlations: the constitution of a religious field that is relatively autonomous and characterized by the production, reproduction, and diffusion of religious goods and services, and also by a growing institutional complexity; the "moralization" of religious practices and representations likewise characterizes religious field. One thus goes from myth to religious ideology (monopolization of the hierocratic constraint by a corps of professionals); from taboo to sin (transfer of the notion of impurity from the magical order to the moral order); from a vengeful God to a just and good God (attribution of increasingly "social" qualities to divinity).[26]

The constitution of a religious field is accompanied by the dispossession of religious capital of laymen towards a group of religious specialists who produce and reproduce a body deliberately organized around secret knowledge. It can thus be said that different social formations fall between two poles: popular religious self-consumption and specialists who monopolize religious production completely. These two extreme positions are defined by the opposition between a practical mastery of thought schemata acquired through simple familiarization on the one hand, and, on the other hand, conscious savant mastery, acquired through intentional and institutionalized pedagogical action. They also acquire structure through ritual-myth systems and religious ideologies – that is, literate reinterpretations of these systems according to internal or external interests linked to the constitution of states and to class antagonisms.[27]

It should be noted that even in the case of societies with little differentiation, Bourdieu suggests importing methods of sociology into ethnology: the latter must go beyond culturalism and conceive of religion as a social fact tied to other social phenomena, notably to the division of labor. Ethnology must be able to incorporate mythic or religious discourse into its social conditions of production while concentrating in particular on the formation and characteristics of privileged agents of magico-religious activity. Of course, this does not

mean that collective religious representations must be evacuated from the field of research; it is simply a matter of understanding their *relative* autonomy within the general social structure.

Finally, the oppositions separating profane from sacred and magic from religion are the symbolic translations of the monopolization by the clergy at the expense of the laity of relations to the supernatural. Calling a practice "profane" or "magic" is a way for the clergy to disqualify it, and above all to disqualify the group practicing it. The notion of magic is therefore an accusatory category used to devalue religious practices considered illegitimate, particularly the practices of conquered peoples or social outcasts. During the Christianization of Europe, for example, pagan religions were attacked this way. To speak of "magic" also gives one the means to label acts of protest deemed as willfully profaning dominant religion (e.g., inverting the crucifix, unbridled sexuality of midnight revels, unorthodox reading of the Bible) by certain dominated groups who see in such inverted religious forms a means of overthrowing the social hierarchy. For Bourdieu, the "religion/magic" distinction is of a political nature; it illustrates those "classification struggles" that always accompany class struggle. In other words, one can deduce, from the progress of the division of religious labor and the history of the religious field, the distinctions between fundamental categories of religious thought and practice.

Structuring and de-structuring of religious field

The process of autonomy for religious field does not imply absolute independence vis-à-vis temporal authorities, in particular political ones. In Bourdieu's sociology, here very influenced by Marxism, perhaps even by Althusser's version of it, religious practices and representations contribute primarily to an essentially conservative "vision of the world." They render the relative absolute while legitimating the arbitrary nature of domination. Also, from the social origin of religious personnel and their trajectory within the institution – one example of which can be found in the structure and history of the "corps" of bishops in the French Catholic church[28] – Bourdieu attempts to explain at once the homogeneity of the episcopate and the division of religious labor at its heart, this division allowing the institution to respond to religious demand.

Religious interests and social function of the religious (internal relations, external relations)

A properly religious *interest* exists. It can be defined in a "strictly sociological manner, i.e., as the legitimizing expression of a social position."[29] During the 1990s, Bourdieu gave a feminist twist to this Marxist inspiration: religion plays a role in legitimizing male dominance over women.. "The Church," he writes without nuance, is "inhabited by the profound antifeminism of the clergy" and it "explicitly inculcates (or inculcated) a familial morality entirely dominated by patriarchal values."[30] It should be added that, in certain cases, religion (or, more exactly, magic) can allow for an (illusory) solution to social suffering: "Magical hope is the aim for the future that belongs to those who have no future…. Revolutionary millennialism and magical utopia are the sole aim for the future available to a class lacking an objective future."[31] Religious interest, as defined by Bourdieu, is the operator of homology between the religious field and the general structure of social rapports.

Relatively autonomous compared to social structure, the religious field is ordered by both internal and external stakes. The positions of powers in the field result from the confrontation of "*religious demand* (i.e., the religious interests of different groups or classes of laymen) and *religious offer* (i.e., the more or less orthodox or heretical religious services)."[32] The position of power that a religious formation occupies within the field depends on the power of the social group from which it draws its support. This support, in a dialectical relationship, depends in turn on the position of the group of producers in the field. This relationship explains the observed homology of structure between the social and religious fields: the dominants of the religious field base their domination on that of the dominant classes of the social order, while prophets count on dominated groups in order to modify the state of power relations within the field. Likewise, the action of the prophet is stimulation for reforming religious field as well as social structure. It appears therefore that the "functioning" of the religious field is the product of an internal rivalry between different parties (the main ones being the Church, prophets, sects, and magicians) and their relationship with the lines of force in the general architecture of social relationships.

One specific case studied by Bourdieu seems particularly relevant: the group of French bishops at the end of the 1970s.

The social origins of bishops and effects on the organization of the Catholic Church

The partnership between Bourdieu and Monique de Saint-Martin explores a limited number of dimensions opened by the 1971 articles. It is principally a question of understanding the processes that lead bishops as a group to deny all internal differentiation corresponding to their social origin. Going beyond the image of homogeneity produced by the body of professionals, one can associate social class origin with the position occupied inside of the ecclesiastical institution, as long as one also takes into account structural deformations: "the same dispositions possibly leading to positions and different or even opposing stances in differing states of field, which instigates weakening, if not the cancellation of the statistical relationship with the original class." In other words, no mechanical relationship exists between social origin and position within the Church.

In these conditions, analysis reveals two groups in the Episcopal corpus: "on the one hand, the 'oblates,' who, dedicated to the Church since early childhood, invest totally in the institution to which they owe everything, who are prepared to give all to the institutions that gave them everything and without which they would be nothing. On the other hand, the bishops who, ordained later, owned, before their entry into the Church, not only inherited social capital but also significant educational capital, and who held because of this a more distant relationship (a relationship less directed toward the temporal) towards the institution, its hierarchy and its stakes."[33] The stances held by this latter group can only be understood by taking historical evolution into account. The same "aristocratic" *habitus* that characterized the "inheritors," who in the past would have defined the role of the hieratic and solemn bishop, can now lead to the avoidance of appointments that are too common, to the acceptance of "missionary" dioceses, or to the search for theologian status. The opposition between the two categories is formal and non-substantial: "the antagonists … can exchange their position in completely good faith: if one of them, usually the dominant one, who has the privilege of audacity, decides to change, then the other can only maintain the opposition by changing too."[34]

How does the body of bishops position itself "in the field of religious power, and more generally in the field of symbolic power"[35]? The bishops are in some ways "caught in the crossfire": they oppose, on one hand, the central political power of ecclesiastical organisms,

showing little interest in local realities; and, on the other hand, they oppose theologians and monks, who are oriented towards "central symbolic power … less occupied by temporal things that preoccupy those 'responsible.'"[36] Assuming this median position in the Catholic church, bishops can fully accomplish the work of unification that they are charged with. Their cohesion is reinforced by common dispositions (they are all men, often from large families, and born in small villages) and a homogenizing education. Thus, the episcopate forms a field of *moderate* competition.[37]

The adjustment between religious supply and demand is not the product of a transaction, as Max Weber envisioned, but rather the effect of an involuntary homology of structure, "each cleric producing according to his trajectory and his position a product more or less adjusted to the demand of a particular category of laymen."[38] The Church, as a field, is defined by its unity and its diversity. This apparent contradiction results in fact from a large capacity of adaptation: it enables the Church "to treat as similarly as possible a clientele [that is] distributed (varying according to time) between social classes, sex and age groups, or to treat as differently as possible the clients who, however different they are, share their Catholicism."[39] This capacity to treat different demands under the appearance of unity is reinforced by the intrinsically polysemic religious discourse that hides behind a single discourse a plurality of meanings related to different social positions, thus reinforcing the subjective confusion of objective social limits. Religious discourse tends to deny social conflicts or at least to euphemize them. Bourdieu even affirms that discursive procedures of double meaning and euphemism are "profoundly characteristic of religious discourse in its universality."[40]

This transfiguration of power relationships, in particular economic ones, by the dominating religious agents is illustrated by the management by the episcopate of the professional demands of laymen who work for the Church and who are on the borderline between volunteers and wage-earners. The hierarchy denies the economy of the Church as one governed by economic laws, that is to say, one based on salary, price, and the law of supply and demand. "The laugh of bishops," when exposed to a discourse that treats the Church as a business, reveals the "truth of the religious enterprise, which is to have two truths: an economic one and a religious one, which denies the first."[41] The episcopate's laughter is a reaction to an incongruity, one that is unveiled to them, and one that is not without foundation, because the

lay church staff members they depend on are in reality a cheap source of labor.

All in all, Bourdieu conceives of the Church as an ensemble of mechanisms and processes legitimizing a social position and presenting itself under an objectified form, be it material (buildings, clothes, liturgical instruments, etc.), or be it in the form of social technology (canon law, liturgy, theology, etc.). At the incorporated stage, the Church is consubstantial to the Catholic *habitus* generated by the Christian family and consecrated by rites of institution that aggregate while separating. "In the end, the Church only exists as a living institution, that is to say one that can act and assume its own reproduction within the relation between its two modes of incarnation…."[42]

Towards a dissolution of the religious field?

Without speaking of evolutionism in its classical sense, Bourdieu's religious sociology is nonetheless characterized by the special attention paid to historical processes concerning the constitution of religious institutions. Those processes are not realized independently of general changes affecting social structure (for example, progress in the division of labor and urbanization). Bourdieu does not use the concept of "religious field" with regard to agrarian societies such as the Kabyles because they lack, according to him, institutions and specialized professionals. Thus, can we talk about "religion" if there is no "religious field"? It might be preferable to select terms like "symbol" or "ritual," because those two concepts do not imply the existence of religious institutions. Concerning the symbolic activity, one cannot use the same terms for agrarian societies (that are less differentiated and in which the "demon of analogy" informs and unifies all the dimensions of the social structure) and for societies that are strongly segmented (where symbolic production is concentrated around specific and relatively autonomous institutional spaces, of which religious field constitutes one of the main ones).

Paradoxically, modern societies characterized by a high degree of social division of labor are also the ones in which historic religions, and in particular Catholicism, are in decline. A "dissolution of the religious" appears: "One can see a redefinition of the limits of the religious field, the dissolution of the religious in a larger field is

accompanied by a loss of the monopoly of the cure of souls in its former sense, at least at the level of the bourgeois clientele."[43] The limits of the religious are not clearly defined anymore: certain profane professions, psychologists, analysts, or marital counselors replace clergy in their therapeutic function. In a dialogue with Jacques Maitre, author of numerous books of social psychopathology applied to individuals deeply involved in Catholicism, Bourdieu declares that "it is very possible that psychoanalysis today, in the general consciousness, takes on a function quite analogous to what religion was"[44] for these persons. Thus, "…religious field has been dissolved into a field of a larger symbolic manipulation…."[45]

On the one hand, the refusal of blind obedience to the prescriptions of clerics comes from an increase in instructional level, which leads less to a rejection of a religious "posture" than to a rejection of the spiritual delegation. This (relative) denial of the legitimacy granted to the Catholic institution thus contributes to the development of autonomous sects, to the "gathering of charismatic little prophets," and more generally, to a disjunction between cultural orthodoxy and actual practices and beliefs. As a consequence, the legitimacy of the institutional religious word competes with new forms of legitimacy and new professions that often rest upon a pseudo-scientific discourse, such as astrologists, numerologists, or graphologists, for example. The formerly dominant clergy becomes dominated by clergy who claim scientific authority (to impose values and truths that in fact are neither more or less scientific than those of the past authorities).[46]

The emergence of an aesthetic feeling towards representations whose original goal is to arouse faith is also a clue to the regression of "religious belief" vis-à-vis "aesthetic belief." In a same place (the Santa Maria Novella church observed by the sociologist in 1982), practices simultaneously dealing with museography and devotion are juxtaposed, which shows the heterogeneity of the public's aims in the "admiration" of a "Virgin with a Rosary" or of the "Presentation to the Temple." The devotional use of statues and icons has not yet completely disappeared but it is more concerned with works whose characteristics are less formal, those that "have an expressive function of the representation of their referents."[47]

It should finally be noted that the "dissolution of the religious" does not mean, for the sociologist, a regression towards an undifferentiated state of symbolic activity. The "new symbolic agents," which are

located outside of the religious institution, coexist with a Catholic institution tending to become a "church without any faithful,"[48] who often oppose it, but who also contribute to improve the position of the Church, as can be seen, for example, by the influence of psychoanalysis on modern religious thought. The symbolic activity at the margins of the religious field, which fosters a certain confusion concerning its limits, does not, however, signify its disappearance.

Conclusion: Dignity and indignity of religion as an object of social science

Symbolic power – certainly not limited to the religious domain – is practiced in it more clearly than in other fields of social activities, and that is probably why a main part of the architecture of Bourdieu's sociology has been constructed around the study of religion. Symbolic power is indeed what enables the constitution of givens through its enunciation, "to make visible and to make believable, to confirm or to transform the vision of the world, and, in this way, the action on the world, therefore in the world." It is "a quasi-magical power that enables acquiring the equivalent of what is obtained by (physical or economical) force. This power is only possible if it is recognized, that is to say, unrecognized as arbitrary."[49] In this perspective, religion appears as an essentially symbolic activity, as a symbolic form, that is to say, like a body of practices and representations (rites and beliefs) whose efficacy is not of a material order (like a physical force, for instance). The symbolic encompasses language but it includes a larger set of human actions. The symbolic defines also the connotative function of signs, linguistic or otherwise. The power of symbol rests upon what it does not explicitly say, upon what it supposes without openly explaining it. It leads to a relation of meaning that is socially founded, signifying that symbolic power is not created outside of the opposing stances that are characteristic of the social structure in its entirety. If symbol has its own efficiency, this efficiency is nonetheless linked to the genesis of the structure of social space. More precisely, concerning the symbolic power of language, symbolic power necessitates "the belief in the legitimacy of words and in the one who repeats them, a belief that is not the responsibility of the words to produce."[50] In other terms, symbolic power is not self sufficient, its foundation lies in the general rapports of domination of which it can appear as a "sublimation."

Between efficiency itself and ideological dependency, between *sui generis* order and *superstructure*, the religious act is neither idealized nor a simple reflection (more or less deformed) of social structure. The secret of this dependence/independence of religious symbolic power is to be found in the intermediary structure that constitutes the center of Bourdieu's sociology of religion: *religious field*. The notion of *habitus* completes the preceding in the sense that it associates with a specific field a type of specific interest that is irreducible to the interests of other fields – in particular, economic ones. "In order for a field to function, there must be stakes and people ready to play the game [people who are] endowed with the *habitus* implying knowledge and recognition of the immanent laws of the game, of the stakes, etc."[51] A specifically religious interest is thus associated with religious field.

Religious field provides a very singular example of the "governed liberty" characteristic of secondary structures in mechanisms of domination (in which the economical and political seem to occupy a central position, at least in industrialized societies). For Bourdieu, religious field must not be conceived of as an immutable reality: a structural genesis exists for it in relation to transformations of social structure, and, according to him, the dissolution of what is religious becomes visible in societies moving towards secularization. While any religious institution tends to be presented as an ahistorical reality, identical to itself in any given time or place, necessary historical analysis reveals the processes behind the constitution of beliefs, rites, and institutions.

It can then be asked why the sociology of religion is of such limited quantitative scope in Bourdieu's corpus, since it gave Bourdieu a large part of his conceptual architecture and since he, more than anyone, was aware of its origins taken from the heart of Durkheim's, Weber's, and, not negligibly, Marx's sociological thought.

This gap stems from a fundamental uncertainty about the possibilities of sociological study of religion. For Bourdieu, religion is in fact an object that is, sociologically speaking, nearly impossible. During the 1982 annual colloquium of the Association Française de Sociologie de Religions, he questions the scientific validity of the sociology of religion when it is practiced by "producers who participate to varying degrees in the religious field."[52] All sociologists of religion are confronted by the following quasi-unsolvable contradiction: "When one is *one of them*," he states, "one participates in the inherent belief in the belonging to a field whatever that field may be (religious, academic,

etc.), and, when one is not *one of them*, one risks first forgetting to inscribe belief into the model…, and, second, being deprived of useful information."[53] The first barrier (i.e., belonging in one way or another to a religious institution), can lead to adopting a religious point of view on religion, to practicing a religious sociology rather than a sociology of religion. To avoid this (which is "difficult" but not "impossible" according to Bourdieu), it is necessary to practice "an objectification without complaisance … of all links, of all forms of participation, of subjective or objective belonging, even the most tenuous."[54] The second barrier (*not being one of them)* is not scientifically any less dangerous. The victim here falls into the positivist trap by approaching religion from an exclusively external point of view, "like a thing," without seeing the subjective forces of religious activity, and in particular the unconditional adhesion to revealed truths.

A certain affinity exists therefore between this second posture and "Republican" social sciences. It has already been underlined that Catholicism was for many centuries a state religion in France, with a strong presence in the school system, particularly in higher education. One of the most important projects of the republican regime of the 1880s was precisely to disengage French society of the Catholic institution's hold.[55] In the educational domain, the Third Republic inaugurated obligatory primary education, free and secular, completely independent of any religious institution.[56] The end of the nineteenth century was thus a violent period of anti-clericalism, one that led to the 1905 law separating church and state. The Catholic Church lost its status of official religion at that time.

It is in this anti-clerical context that French sociology is born. It constituted itself largely in opposition to the intellectual hold of religion, and singularly against Catholic influence in the university at the turn of the twentieth century. In one sense, being a sociologist necessarily meant not being Catholic, not being "*one of them*" (which might seem surprising in North America where the status of insider is frequently valued for guaranteeing access to trustworthy information rather than as a hindrance for science). Bourdieu was not exempt from this form of anti-clericalism. In the conclusion to the conference on "the new clergy," this unambiguous declaration appears: "The question of the "new clergy" would perhaps not have missed its target had it been able to lead to the founding of a new anti-clericalism."[57] This conclusive sentence was dropped from the second version of *Choses dites*. This penance assuredly speaks to a certain malaise, one that Bourdieu tries to explain in an interview with Jacques Maître:

> I had to rediscover in my own mind all the mutilations that I had inherited from the secular tradition and reinforced by the implicit presuppositions of my science. There are subjects that one does not tackle, or only with the greatest prudence. There are ways of approaching certain subjects that are a little dangerous and, finally, one accepts the mutilations that science had to accept in order to constitute itself. One feels obliged – by an implicit adhesion that is linked to entry into the profession – to put between parentheses all that comes from the order of traditional objects of religion and metaphysics. There is a kind of repression that is tacitly required of the professional.[58]

Nonetheless, this pittance of sympathy does not completely explain the gap between the recognized theoretical importance of religion and the small amount of research and publications in the area. After all, Bourdieu dedicated a work to criticizing male domination, another to denouncing the power of television. To religion's case must be added Bourdieu's conviction that religion is a *declining institution* in differentiated societies. In other words, Bourdieu manifested no inclination for religious activity (while his taste for art and literature, and of course pedagogy, is well known), but this distance was doubled by the idea that religion no longer has the social hold that it had at the time of Weber or Durkheim, who had made it a central object of their sociology. Bourdieu therefore had no *negative interest* in religion (while he takes on the media or the "Nobility of State," whose power is seen as contemporary).

Thus, this double orientation probably led Bourdieu to reduce the social role of instituted religions while singularly focusing his attention on the Catholic Church. In the studies on the Kabyles, Islam is completely absent, as if a strict division exists between agrarian societies without a religious institution and differentiated societies in which religion would be entirely monopolized by the Church before disappearing at the same time as it. But, if the Catholic Church no longer has the economic or political power it had, does that mean that *religious* beliefs and practices have disappeared from modern societies? Little is less clear. First, while focusing on Catholicism, and in particular on French Catholicism, which was the state religion until the twentieth century, Bourdieu assuredly minimized the importance of the question of religious pluralism that cannot be ignored in North America. What is more, a definition of "religion" centered on "religious field" (that is, on the battles between specialists in their relationships with global social structure) only somewhat allows for the study of religious phenomena that take place beyond the power of clerics, even when these are the "new clerics." This error of perspective might

have been avoided by leaving more room for the religious act outside of the institution, *including in differentiated societies*. By turning our attention to the individual "bricolage" of beliefs, to the network organization of amateurs of esotericism, to the non-bureaucratic organization of certain Pentecostalisms, to the original power structure found in Santeria, for instance, one avoids the impasse created by simply reporting the Catholic Church's loss of social power.

Notes

1. Translated from "Pierre Bourdieu et la religion: synthèse critique d'une synthèse critique," which first appeared in *Archives de Sciences Sociales des Religions* 2002, 118 (April-June): 5–19. The work has been revised and modified by the author for the American edition. [Translator's note: I have tried, when possible, to use previous translations of Bourdieu's works by Richard Nice and others. These works are listed as such here. All other translations are my own.]
2. Pierre Bourdieu, *In Other Words*, translated by Matthew Adamson (Stanford: Stanford University Press), 22.
3. Ibid., 49.
4. In 1962, Bourdieu already used the concept of habitus in the study of peasant celibacy in Bearn, but this concept, at this stage of his career, was defined, following Marcel Mauss, as a set of body techniques. (I thank Gisèle Sapiro for this useful remark.) See the recent re-edition of the study: Pierre Bourdieu, *Le bal des célibataires – Crise de la société paysanne en Béarn* (Paris: Seuil, 2002).
5. Pierre Bourdieu, "Postface" to Erwin Panofsky, *Architecture gothique et pensée scolastique* (Paris: Editions de Minuit, 1967), 161.
6. Bourdieu, "Postface" to *Architecture gothique et pensée scholastique*, 162.
7. Pierre Bourdieu, "Pratique rituelle et discours," *Bulletin du Centre Thomas More* 21 (1978): 3–10.
8. David Swartz, "Bridging the Study of Culture and Religion: Pierre Bourdieu's Political Economy of Symbolic Power," *Sociology of Religion* 57 (1996): 71–85. In a forthcoming article ("Spiritual Capital: Theorizing Religion with Bourdieu against Bourdieu"), Bradford Verter adopts a rather different point of view on the sociology of religion in Bourdieu from the view of Swartz and from my own. According to Verter, Bourdieu's sociology of religion is somewhat cursory and "Voltairian"; it is within his cultural sociology, more highly developed and complex, that one can find the necessary tools for forging new concepts useful in studying religions – for example, the idea of "spiritual capital" that Verter defines very precisely. Such an approach seems particularly innovative.
9. Pierre Bourdieu, *The Logic of Practice*, translated by Richard Nice (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990).
10. Pierre Bourdieu, "Genèse et structure du champ religieux," *Revue Française de sociologie* XII/2 (1971), 295–334.
11. See Pierre Bourdieu and Monique de Saint-Martin, "La Sainte Famille: l'épiscopat français dans le champ du pouvoir," *Actes de la Recherche en Sciences Sociales* 44–45 (1982): 1–53. Concerning the "dissolution" of the religious, refer to "Le champ religieux dans le champ de manipulation symbolique," in Collectif, *Les nouveaux*

clercs – Prêtres, pasteurs et spécialistes des relations humaines et de la santé (Genève: Labor et Fides, 1985), 255–261 – this was reprinted partially under the title "La dissolution du religieux" in *Choses dites* (Paris: Editions de Minuit, 1987), 117–123.

12. Bourdieu, "Genèse et structure du champ religieux," 295.
13. Ibid., 297.
14. Pierre Bourdieu, "Une interprétation de la théorie de la religion selon Max Weber," *Archives européennes de sociologie* 12 (1971): 1.
15. Ibid., 6.
16. Bourdieu, "Genèse et structure du champ religieux," 300.
17. Pierre Bourdieu, *The Logic of Practice*, 223.
18. Claude Lévi-Strauss, *La Pensée sauvage* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1962).
19. Bourdieu, *The Logic of Practice*, 223.
20. Ibid., 234.
21. Ibid., 240.
22. Marcel Mauss and Henri Hubert, "Esquisse d'une théorie générale de la magie," in *Sociologie et anthropologie* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1985), 119.
23. Ibid., "Esquisse d'une théorie générale de la magie," 135.
24. Bourdieu, *The Logic of Practice*, 240.
25. See note 7, "Orders, Classes and Religions," in Max Weber, "Les types de communalisation religieuse (sociologie de la religion)," in *Economie et société* (Paris: Plon, 1971).
26. Bourdieu, "Genèse et structure du champ religieux," 303.
27. Ibid., 304–306.
28. Pierre Bourdieu and Monique de Saint Martin, "La Sainte Famille : l'épiscopat français dans le champ du pouvoir."
29. Bourdieu, "Genèse et structure du champ religieux," 311–312.
30. Pierre Bourdieu, *La domination masculine* (Paris: Seuil, 1998), 92–93.
31. Pierre Bourdieu, *Algérie 60* (Paris: Editions de Minuit, 1977), 90–91.
32. Bourdieu, "Genèse et structure du champ religieux," 319.
33. Bourdieu and Saint Martin, "La Sainte Famille: l'épiscopat français dans le champ du pouvoir," 4–5.
34. Ibid., 16.
35. Ibid., 222.
36. Ibid., 28.
37. Ibid., 31.
38. Ibid., 34.
39. Ibid., 35.
40. Ibid., 46.
41. Pierre Bourdieu, "Le rire des évêques," in *Raisons Pratiques – Sur la théorie de l'action* (Paris: Seuil, 1994), 204.
42. Ibid., 51.
43. Pierre Bourdieu, *Choses dites* (Paris: Editions de Minuit, 1987), 120. [Translator's note: The chapter called "La dissolution du religieux" is not included in the English translation of *Choses dites* (*In Other Words*) quoted earlier on. This is thus my translation, as are all references cited as *Choses dites*.]
44. Pierre Bourdieu and Jacques Maître, "Avant-propos dialogué," in Jacques Maître, *L'autobiographie d'un paranoïaque – L'abbé Berry (1878–1947) et le roman de Billy, Introïbo* (Paris: Anthropos, 1994), XVI.

45. Pierre Bourdieu, *Choses dites*, 121.
46. Ibid., 123.
47. Pierre Bourdieu, "Piété religieuse et dévotion artistique," *Actes de la Recherche en Sciences Sociales*, 105 (December 1994): 73.
48. Pierre Bourdieu, "Propos sur l'économie de l'église," in *Raisons Pratiques – Sur la théorie de l'action* (Paris, Seuil, 1994), 216.
49. Pierre Bourdieu, "Sur le pouvoir symbolique," *Annales ESC,* XXXII/3 (1977): 410.
50. Ibid., 411.
51. Pierre Bourdieu, "Haute culture et haute couture," in *Questions de sociologie* (Paris: Edition de Minuit, 1984), 114.
52. Pierre Bourdieu, "Sociologues de la croyance et croyances de sociologies," *Archives de Sciences Sociales des Religions* 63/1 (1987): 156.
53. Ibid., 156.
54. Ibid., 160.
55. René Rémond, *L'Anticléricalisme en France de 1815 à nos jours* (Paris: Fayard, 1976), 75.
56. Republican power did not, however, suppress Catholic primary, secondary, and higher education when it was *private*, and it continued to exist in parallel with public education. In other words, the obligatory nature of primary education did not necessarily imply secular schooling since children could be placed in private institutions. The coexistence of the two concurrent educational systems set the stage for numerous political confrontations all during the twentieth century as measures favoring either private or public education came before the National Assembly. Massive protests were organized in all the major cities for one or the other "camps." This structural confrontation has been called the "War of Two Frances," Catholic and secular France, an opposition that only partially corresponds to the political dichotomy of "right/left."
57. Pierre Bourdieu, "Le champ religieux dans le champ de manipulation symbolique," in Collectif, *Les nouveaux clercs – Prêtres, pasteurs et spécialistes des relations humaines et de la santé* (Genève: Labor et Fides, 1985), 261.
58. Pierre Bourdieu and Jacques Maître, "Avant-propos dialogué," XV.