

Modern Times: Religion, Consecration, and the State in Bourdieu¹

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Abstract: Bourdieu held that the state in modernity has become the primary agent of consecration—the legitimation and naturalization of social difference—a function formerly performed largely by religion. After clarifying the role of ‘religion’ in Bourdieu’s work, this paper brings two empirical issues into dialogue with his ideas: social fragmentation in late-modernity, and the relation between temporalization and social structures in medieval and early-modern charity. His view that religion is anachronistic, that it was left behind by modernization, misses its continuing, even increasing, importance. He overemphasized the centrality and authority of the state in modernity and distinguished too sharply between pre-modern gifting and modern market relations. Once these limitations are mitigated, Bourdieu’s analysis can be redirected to account for the importance of religion as an agent of consecration globally today.

Keywords: cultural capital, gift, habitus, modernity, religion, temporality, Weber

Pierre Bourdieu’s work has only recently begun to have an impact on the academic study of religion in North America, but his influence promises to grow over the coming years. He is cited by several authors in two recent important critical overviews of the field of religious studies (Taylor 1998; Braun and McCutcheon 2000); a number of papers working with his ideas have appeared in relevant journals (e.g., Bell 1990; Swartz 1996; Berlinerblau 1999); and two program units of the discipline’s largest learned society, the American Academy of Religion, have held recent sessions on the relevance of his work.² Sociology of religion has played a paradigmatic role in Bourdieu’s work, providing the genesis of his concepts of ‘field,’ ‘field of power,’ and ‘consecration’; and his work provides an important set of ideas for analyzing the resurgent importance of religion as a global phenomenon today.

In the final sentence of his *Pascalian Meditations*, Bourdieu writes that “Durkheim was . . . not so naïve as is claimed when he said . . . that ‘society is God’” (2000, 245). This invocation of God underlines his view that the state in modernity has become the primary agent of consecration—the legitimation and naturalization of social difference—a function formerly performed largely by religion. But Bourdieu’s overemphasis on the centrality and authority of the state in modernity and an overly

1 I would like to thank Cynthia Patton and Ann Taves for insightful comments and Rosemary Hale for first suggesting to me Bourdieu’s value for the study of religion.

2 The History of Christianity Section in 1998 and the Critical Theory and Discourses on Religion Group in 2000 held sessions on Bourdieu. This essay draws on presentations that I made at both these sessions.

sharp distinction between pre-modern gifting and modern market relations are weak points in his analysis. The trajectory of this paper is not one of critique but of bringing two additional empirical issues into dialogue with Bourdieu's ideas: social fragmentation in late-modernity, and the relation between temporalization and social structures in medieval and early-modern charity. This will make it possible to extend Bourdieu's analyses in a way that highlights the role of religion in modernity. His view that religion is anachronistic, that it was left behind by modernization, misses its continuing, and even increasing, importance. Once certain limitations are mitigated, Bourdieu's analysis can be redirected to account for the importance of religion as an agent of consecration globally today.

Priest, Prophet and 'Field'

Religion plays a basic role in Bourdieu's work as the font of his concept of the field. Bourdieu initially elaborated this concept in two papers, first published in 1971, in which he rethought Weber's sociology of religion, foregrounding the distinction between 'priest' and 'prophet' (Bourdieu 1987a, 1991; cf. Bourdieu 1985; Weber 1978, 38, 54, 424, 439ff., 1158ff.). Bourdieu relativized Weber's conceptual distinction, suggesting that this tension between orthodoxy and heterodoxy, between established and innovative authority, plays itself out in every context where humans struggle for control over some form of capital, whether economic, cultural, artistic, or religious. These arenas of struggles constitute separate 'fields.'³

Bourdieu argues that Weber's mainly individualistic concept of charisma must be understood in relational terms. The charisma of the prophet stands over against the routinized and institutionalized interests of the priest in a paradigmatic tension between heterodoxy and orthodoxy. The struggle between priest and prophet for control of religious capital constitutes the religious field. Weber's 'routinization of charisma,' in Bourdieu's view, represents the consolidation of control over religious capital, as prophet becomes priest.

For Bourdieu, the priest plays a conservative role, attempting to maintain control over religious capital, and the prophet is an innovator, producing a new variant of religious goods, attempting to capture a share of the market. Prophets are "the *initial producers* of the principles of a (quasi-) systematic view of the world," and priests, churches and other recognized authorities are "the agencies of reproduction": "The prophet stands opposed to the priestly body as the *discontinuous* to the *continuous*, the extraordinary to the ordinary, the non-routine to the routine and the banal. . . ."

³ Hans Kippenberg, in his important recent study of the History of Religions as a response to modernization, summarizes Weber's core agenda in a manner that conveniently highlights Bourdieu's concerns: "Like every other social behavior, economic behavior requires a meaning adequate for it. . . . Conduct that refers to the behavior of others can be successful only if all parties are attributing to it the same meaning. Regular social interactions materialize only when the parties agree about the validity of a system of meaning, a worldview. Meaning is anything but self-evident. Yet, in this context, everything depends on the binding force of such a worldview. Only if absolute validity is ascribed to it is there a good chance of a regular success of interaction. These considerations led Weber to turn his attention to religions and their history. In the history of religion, he assumed a system of meaning that guides the economic behavior of the individual" (2002, 159-160). In a sense, the purpose of the present essay is to try to loosen the soil around Bourdieu's Weberian roots.

(Bourdieu 1987a, 126-27).⁴ The tension between the orthodoxy of the priest and the heterodoxy of the prophet is expressed in the former's strategies of conservation and maintenance of tradition and in the latter's strategies of succession or subversion. These revisions of Weber's analysis established the trajectory that the concept of field was to take in Bourdieu's later work.

An important function of religion, according to Bourdieu, is the legitimation of existing social positions by obscuring economic inequalities, a process he calls consecration. (This is precisely where he will later argue that the state steps in to replace religion.) The power to perform this legitimizing function is a primary object of the struggles between priests (or the church) and prophets:

Religion exercises an effect of consecration . . . by inculcating a system of consecrated practices and representations whose structure . . . reproduces, in a transfigured and therefore misrecognizable form, the structure of economic and social relations in force in a determinate social formation (Bourdieu 1991, 14). Competition for religious power owes its specificity . . . to the fact that what is at stake is the *monopoly of the legitimate exercise of the power to modify, in a deep and lasting fashion, the practice and world-view of lay people*, by imposing on and inculcating in them a particular religious habitus (1987a, 126). [T]he struggle for the monopoly over the legitimate exercise of religious power over the laity and over the administration of the goods of salvation is necessarily organized around the opposition between *the church* and *the prophet* (1991, 22).

Social Change and the Religious Field

Bourdieu's concept of the field is central to his account of social change, and here again his analysis draws heavily on Weber's sociology of religion. Critics have argued that he cannot account for social change because he has a deterministic conception of the relation between habitus and structure. Habitus is an embodied disposition that is both structured and structuring. This seems deterministic because, once embodied in the habitus, structures would seem to reproduce themselves. Habitus, on its own, would be a fundamentally conservative concept (cf. Friday Group 1990, 203-4; Swartz 1997, 211-213). For Bourdieu, however, social change is rooted not in the habitus alone but in its relation to specific fields.

On the one hand, each field is structured by an implicit agreement among contending actors that the struggle for this capital is worthwhile. This mutual interest in preserving the field is embodied in the habitus of the actors. On the other hand, the struggle for capital shapes the experiences of actors, raising the possibility that expectations, embodied in the habitus, of attaining to a certain degree of control over capital might not be met. This mismatch between expectations and actuality is the source of social change, as actors and their strategies and practices adapt over time (Swartz 1997, 211ff.; cf. Calhoun 1993). The degree of match or mismatch determines the extent to which practices are oriented to preserving or changing existing structures. For Bourdieu, this mismatch is correlated with a sense of contingency and insecurity that is

⁴ Italics in all citations from Bourdieu are in the originals.

linked closely to the state's role as an agent of consecration. We will return to this point below.

This interrelation of habitus and field allows Bourdieu to account for change within fields. However, it does not account for emergence or differentiation of fields, processes central to his theory of modernization. Making sense of this higher-level change involves considering, again, his debt to Weber. In this context, Bourdieu presents a more specific account of change in terms of field dynamics:

The *exchange* relations established between specialists and laypersons on the basis of different interests, and the relations of *competition*, which oppose various specialists to each other inside the religious field, constitute the principle of the dynamic of the religious field and therefore of the transformation of religious ideology. (1991, 17)

His account of differentiation draws on a different aspect of this appeal to the categories of priest and prophet: the prophet's role is central to "the problem of the *initial accumulation of the capital of symbolic power*" (Bourdieu 1987a, 130). Bourdieu argues that the prophet, the religious innovator who champions a new revelation, does not represent "an *ex nihilo creation of religious capital*": "It is because he realizes, in his person and in his discourse, the meeting of a signifying and a signified that *predated* him . . . that he can mobilize groups or classes that recognize his language because they recognize themselves in him . . ." (Bourdieu 1991, 34, 35). As the priest is an agent of conservatism, so the prophet is an agent of change, acting to crystallize latent tendencies among the laity. Bourdieu's account of social change underlines two dynamic relations between habitus and field; each field constitutes a market of sorts, and its dynamism is due to transactions both within the field and across its boundaries.

To summarize, Bourdieu developed his concept of the field by making three claims about religion. First, at the most general level, the function of religion is to provide the laity with "*justifications of their existence . . . as occupants of a determinate social position*" (Bourdieu 1987a, 124). That is, "theodicies are always *sociodicies*" (Bourdieu 1991, 16). Second, religious power, the legitimized symbolic violence that produces these justifications, is primarily "the product of a *transaction* between religious agents and lay people" (Bourdieu 1987a, 129). Third, religious and social change is driven both by competition among specialists within the field and by transactions across the boundary of the field.

Religion and the Field of Power

Religion also plays a role in Bourdieu's concept of the field of power, a concept that became increasingly important as he began to develop his views on the state. 'Field of power' sometimes appears synonymous in his work with 'dominant social class' (e.g., 1993, 20). However, as he specified his thinking, he came to believe that the field of power is a sort of 'meta-field' that mediates and organizes the struggles that take place in the range of differentiated fields (Bourdieu 1994; cf. Swartz 1997, 136). The field of power is constituted by a fundamental opposition between economic capital and cultural capital: "The various fields in which the diverse forms of capital monopolized by

the bourgeoisie circulate . . . are arrayed according to the objective hierarchy between the two dominant forms of power in contention, economic power and cultural power” (Wacquant 1993, 10; cf. Bourdieu 1977b, 115; 1993, 20).

Toward the end of his career, Bourdieu extended his analysis of the field of power to include the notion of “statist capital,” a sort of meta-capital that structures relational positions in the field of power (Bourdieu 1994, 4-5; cf. 2000, 103, 124). Statist capital constitutes power over other forms of capital, controlling their conversion and exchange rate. It emerged historically as the state became a site of concentration of various fields. According to Bourdieu,

the construction of the State proceeds apace with the construction of a *field of power* defined as the space of play within which the holders of capital (of different species) struggle *in particular* for power over the State, i.e., over the statist capital granting power over the different species of capital and over their reproduction. . . . (Bourdieu 1994, 5)

The field of power, then, is central to Bourdieu’s theory of modernization and to his analysis of the state.

The nature and status of religion are at issue here. On one hand, Bourdieu generally treats religion as one symbolic system among many others, including art and language (1977b, 112; 1991, 3). But, at the same time, he sees Weber’s sociology of religion as a privileged model of a more general political economy of social forms (Lash 1993, 193; Swartz 1997, 41; cf. Wacquant 1993, 2-3). This tension stems from Bourdieu’s contention that religion no longer plays the central role in the modern world that it did in the pre-modern. This is clear in his account of the state and its role as the primary agent of consecration in modernity. Yet, a critical look at his analysis suggests that religion is more than a convenient analytical subject.

Consecration and the State

Despite Bourdieu’s frequent banishment of religion to the past, it continues to play a prominent role in his analysis of the state. He argues that the state has become the primary site of consecration; as such, it is a “realization of God on earth” (2000, 245). Religion traditionally provided the laity with justifications of their socially determinate existences, a function now performed by the state. Understanding Bourdieu’s claim here involves two steps: clarifying the concept of consecration by emphasizing its key aspects, contingency, time, and social distance; and drawing out the implications of Bourdieu’s theory of modernization for the rise of the state and the alleged decline of religion.

The relation between time, habitus and field is central to Bourdieu’s characterization of the process of consecration. His concept of habitus transcends conventional theoretical tensions between agency and structure. The habitus is a set of embodied dispositions structured by and structuring each individual’s social position, and Bourdieu emphasizes its temporality: “Habitus is that presence of the past in the present which makes possible the presence in the present of the forth-coming” (2000, 210). On this basis, a sense of contingency is seen to be a structural condition of human

agency. Shaped by the past, the habitus embodies certain expectations. Open to the future, it faces the possibility that these expectations will not be met. Insecurity and contingency arise from this potential mismatch between expectations rooted in the habitus and objective chances presented by the social world.

Consecration, by legitimizing social distinction, directly addresses this sense of insecurity. Consecration serves to minimize contingency by justifying the socially-situated existence of individuals, i.e., it tells people that where they find themselves is where they are meant to be. For Bourdieu, the state is the primary agent of consecration in the modern West. The distribution of statist capital, of economic and symbolic capital within the field of power, invests a contingent spectrum of social positions with an apparent necessity. It does this primarily by framing relations within and among the differentiated fields of the modern world, including science, literature, politics, and the arts. We find here “the quasi-divine power of rescuing people from contingency and gratuitousness that is possessed . . . by the social world, and which is exercised in particular through the institution of the state: as the central bank of symbolic capital” (2000, 240).

By making time central to his account of consecration, Bourdieu underlines the importance of practice. He argues that “social distances are written into . . . the relationship to the body, to language and to time” (Bourdieu 1990b, 128). The relation between time and habitus grounds his account of the contingency that requires consecration. And the relation between habitus and field is central to this account of the temporalization of human agents: “it is in and by practice, through the practical implication that it implies, that social agents temporalize themselves. But they can ‘make’ time only in so far as they are endowed with habitus adjusted to the field. . . . Time . . . is the product of an act of construction . . .” (2000, 213). The concept of consecration points to this process by which the habitus becomes adjusted to the fields within which individuals are situated. Consecration both reflects and shapes the temporalization of human agents. Consecration is based in the relation between time and social distance, between habitus and field, and the state’s role as agent of consecration is based in its relation to the field of power and to the distribution of statist capital.

It is clear that Bourdieu reformulated key categories from Weber’s sociology of religion to develop his own theoretical apparatus. However, Bourdieu then seems to have left religion behind as he moved on to other issues of concern, especially when he argues that the state in modernity takes over religion’s pre-modern role as primary agent of consecration. Challenging Bourdieu’s view of the anachronism of religion prepares the ground for this paper’s central claim: that religion still plays an important role, consistent with Bourdieu’s analysis, but contrary to his explicit claims.

Modernization, Religion, and the State

The issue of religion’s status is inseparable from Bourdieu’s theory of modernization. Although he wrote little directly addressing modernization, it is possible to draw out a useful and insightful account from his work (Lash 1990). Like many theorists, Bourdieu sees differentiation and reflexivity as the key characteristics of modernity (cf. Benavides 1998). His theory of modernization emphasizes relations

between (1) patterns of production and consumption of different forms of capital, (2) the social spheres, or fields, that shape and are shaped by these processes of circulation and conversion, and (3) the habitus, forming and formed by these social structures. According to Bourdieu, each of these areas undergoes a process of increasing differentiation that defines the modern period. This differentiation allows the state to gain its leverage over the many forms of capital in many disparate fields and so to act as agent of consecration, naturalizing the increasingly differentiated modern habitus in this complex social space, as a shift from personal to impersonal and objective mechanisms of domination (Bourdieu 1977a, 189-90).⁵ Bourdieu emphasizes two distinct dimensions of modernization: (1) an increasing differentiation of types of fields and capital, and of field-specific accommodations of the habitus; and (2) a shift from gift to market as the most important type of social exchange relations shaping social structures. After clarifying each of these, we will confront Bourdieu's conceptual apparatus with a broader range of empirical cases, extending his analysis in a way that underlines the increasing importance of religion in the twenty-first century.

Differentiation. Bourdieu characterizes modernization largely in terms of a contrast between traditional societies, undifferentiated and shaped by motivations of honour, and modern societies, differentiated and shaped by competition for specific forms of capital within relatively autonomous fields (cf. Lash 1990). For Bourdieu, the state emerges historically when the field of power comes to be the primary space of struggle for various species of capital: that is, when processes of differentiation have progressed to the point that distributions of capital within autonomous fields can be determined by the distribution of statist capital within a meta-field, the field of power. The differentiation of fields makes possible the state's act of consecration in part by providing the field of power with greater purchase on individual fields.

Modernization, for Bourdieu, also depends on increasing differentiation of the habitus. The state's power of consecration is fostered by the proliferation of increasingly differentiated fields. As a corollary, the individual habitus becomes differentiated, reflecting and enabling struggles for capital in a variety of different fields (cf. Lash 1990, 262-63).⁶

The state's consecratory function is made possible and necessary by the increased need for justification, legitimization, or identity in the face of these several dimensions

⁵ In doing so, Craig Calhoun notes, Bourdieu "has given us an account not just of a distinctive mode of domination, but of the break between two modes of social integration [traditional personal and modern mediated]" (Calhoun 1993, 76). Bourdieu echoes but transcends comparable accounts: e.g., Benjamin Nelson's account of a historical shift "from tribal brotherhood to universal otherhood" (1969); or Karl Polanyi's view that, in the modern world, "Instead of the economy being embedded in social relations, social relations are embedded in the economic system" (1957, 57). Bourdieu goes further both in specifying the mutual relations between market-type exchange and social difference and between embodied agency and social structures.

⁶ The differentiation of habitus is reflected in another related dimension of differentiation: the doxa. A doxa is "a set of fundamental beliefs which does not even need to be asserted in the form of an explicit, self-conscious dogma" (Bourdieu 2000, 15). The term refers, like habitus, to unthought, bodily inscribed, categories. A doxa, however, is field specific (Bourdieu 2000, 10-11); and the differentiation of doxa in modernity parallels the differentiation of fields. This first account of modernization suggests a transition from a single undisputed doxa to a plurality shaped by struggles between orthodoxy and heterodoxy in various autonomous fields.

of differentiation: “what truly is the stake in this game . . . is the question of the legitimacy of an existence, an individual’s right to feel justified in existing as he or she exists” (Bourdieu 2000, 237). The consecratory power of pre-modern religion reflected the more diffuse boundaries of the religious field, allowing transactions with the laity to shape and be shaped by the differential distribution of religious capital between priests and prophets. The modern state is a meta-field correlating the flow of capital in and between many distinct sub-fields; pre-modern religion was less separate from and more implicated in all fields, insofar as these were not yet clearly differentiated. Bourdieu’s first account of modernization emphasizes a shift from a very general type of symbolic capital with a broad sphere of circulation, mediated primarily by religion, to a multitude of types of capital, each operative in a distinct field, and all mediated by the meta-field of the field of power: “a shift from a diffuse symbolic capital, resting solely on collective recognition, to an objectified symbolic capital, codified, delegated and guaranteed by the state, in a word bureaucratized” (Bourdieu 1994, 11).

From Gift to Market. Bourdieu’s second account of modernization emphasizes a shift from gift- to market-relations. His analysis of the relation between gifting and time provides a criterion for distinguishing between traditional and modern social relations and, hence, for comparing the role of time in the processes of consecration performed by pre-modern Christianity and the modern state. Based on his anthropological fieldwork in Kabylia in Algeria, Bourdieu argues that many constitutive social interactions in traditional societies are carried out by means of exchanges (1977a; 1990a). These exchanges—of gifts, women, retributive injuries, and land—are unmediated, and, as such, they both mark and constitute social relations at the local level. In traditional societies, gift relations distinguish ‘us’ from ‘them’ and keep ‘us’ together; whereas relations with ‘them’ are characterized by, and shaped by, more calculable and quantifiable market-type relations. In modern societies, however, exchanges are universally mediated by market-like spaces, that is, fields. As individual fields became increasingly differentiated with modernization, they framed a variety of symbolic markets that mediate social relations. Agency and identity in modernity are worked out in and through the struggles for different types of capital that constitute these autonomous fields.

Bourdieu’s analysis highlights the role of time in the gift. He underlines a basic distinction between theoretical and practical points of view on this issue (1990a, 98ff.). Anthropologists tend to see gifting in synchronic terms, as a ‘cycle’ of gift and counter-gift. However, this theoretical perspective necessarily fails to perceive the element of time, of uncertainty, that defines the practice of gifting (cf. Taylor 1993, 56-7). Bourdieu notes that this uncertainty allows “room for strategies that consist in playing with the time, or rather the tempo, of the action” (Bourdieu 1990a, 106). However, these strategies of practice can only work if the expectation of a return is disguised. The practical perspective necessarily fails to perceive the element of exchange, of calculated reciprocity, that is essential to the theoretical understanding of gifting: “Gift exchange is the paradigm of all the operations through which symbolic alchemy produces the reality-denying reality . . . [of] a collectively produced . . . misrecognition of the ‘objective’ truth” (1990a, 110). Time is the hallmark of practice and the medium of the misrecognition:

The interval between gift and counter-gift is what allows a relation of exchange that is always liable to appear as irreversible, that is, both forced and self-interested, to be seen as reversible. . . . [T]he lapse of time that separates the gift from the counter-gift is what allows the deliberate oversight, the collectively maintained and approved self-deception, without which the exchange could not function. Gift exchange is one of the social games that cannot be played unless the players refuse to acknowledge the objective truth of the game. . . . (Bourdieu 1990a, 105)

In other words, the element of uncertainty in the gift (Will one's gift evoke a counter-gift? If so, when?) has, for the anthropologist, an obvious function promoting social cohesion and marking social difference. In this sense, the structure of the game forces one to return gifts for one's own sake. But, these functions presuppose that the participants in the cycle of exchange ignore this fact: their mutual "self-deception" is to see these forced gifts as free; and it is because they are seen as free that they are able to function as tokens in this social game.

This relation between gift, time, and social distance forms the heart of Bourdieu's second account of modernization. In traditional societies, transactions with strangers take on characteristics of 'economic' transactions; fixed terms reflect a low degree of mutual trust. Transactions with kin and neighbours, on the other hand, take the form of gift-exchanges, in which greater flexibility and uncertainty reflect the higher degree of trust (Bourdieu 1990a, 115).. The prominence of gift, time, and uncertainty, is inversely proportional to social distance. In traditional societies, the gift stays close to home, and the market extends to strangers: gifting for 'us' and market for 'them.' Gifting in traditional societies marks out a sphere of social proximity; whereas market relations in modern societies relations extend throughout society, framed by a variety of more or less autonomous fields.

Modern Times: Consecration at the Margins of the State

Both of these accounts of modernization are limited in ways that occlude the importance of religion in modernity. Bourdieu's first account of modernization finds the state becoming the primary agent of consecration as a result of a variety of differentiation processes. It would be facile to argue that his conception of the state is too determined by the North American-Northern Europe axis, too Eurocentric, or too French. Two other questions are more important. Does his account of the state as the consecrating field of power take sufficient account of those at the margins of economies of symbolic and economic capital? And do the social conditions of late-modernity call into question his hierarchal subsumption of all fields under the field of power as unified by the state?

At the time of his death, Bourdieu had only begun to grapple seriously with issues of social fragmentation, exclusion, and the margins of fields. Continued work along these lines does not threaten his basic framework; rather, it highlights the changed and changing importance of religion in the world today, a world characterized by complex and contradictory social, economic, and political developments. His exclusive emphasis

on the state as the primary agent of consecration begs important questions of globalization processes occurring above the level of the state and localized reactions and fragmentation below it. In the face of these developments, as the growth of Pentecostalism and the hardening of fundamentalisms in religious traditions around the world suggest, religion is more important as a site of consecration than Bourdieu acknowledges.

The declining centrality of the state is a commonplace, emphasized, for example, in the *Daedalus* issue dedicated to the theme of “multiple modernities”:

The ideological and symbolic centrality of the nation-state, its position as the charismatic locus of the major components of the cultural program of modernity and collective identity, have been weakened; new political, social, and civilizational visions, new visions of collective identity, are being developed. These novel visions and identities were proclaimed by a variety of new social movements---all of which, however different, have challenged the premises of the classical modern nation and its program of modernity, which had hitherto occupied the unchallenged center of political and cultural thinking. (Eisenstadt 2000, 16-17)

The new era of ‘glocalization’ (globalization + localization), of “Jihad vs. McWorld (Barber, 1992),” is rift by tensions between globalization and local counter-reactions. Theorists of late-modernity like Ulrich Beck emphasize related sociological factors such as un- and underemployment, along with the globalization of risks, the erosion of trust in science and expertise more generally, the radical atomization of social relations (Beck 1992).

These various factors increase the sense of contingency in human lives, resulting in the increasing importance of processes of consecration. Consecration eases this sense of contingency and insecurity by framing people’s expectations in terms of their specific social position, at the same time that it legitimizes and naturalizes an entire spectrum of social positions. Yet, as we enter the twenty-first century, the state (in its capacity as a central bank of symbolic capital) is unable to function as effectively as an agent of consecration. Changes in employment patterns are leaving an increasing number of people excluded from economies of economic and symbolic capital: the meta-field of the state does not extend so far.

In his late work, Bourdieu began to address the issue of “stigmatized populations” (2000, 233). However, he begs the issue of the boundaries of fields by making a curious conceptual move in order to maintain the stigmatized within the field of power:

In the hierarchy of worth and unworthiness, which can never be perfectly imposed on the hierarchy of wealth and powers, the nobleman, in his traditional variant, or in his modern form . . . is opposed to the stigmatized pariah who, like the Jew in Kafka’s time or, now, the Black in the ghetto or the Arab or Turk in working class suburbs of European cities, bears the curse of a negative symbolic capital. (2000, 241)

The topology of Bourdieu’s structural homologies between fields begins to get

complicated: if each field is defined by a struggle over one of the various forms of capital, then how are those with negative symbolic capital within the field? How are we to understand ‘negative symbolic capital’—rather than simply ‘no capital’—in the field of power?

Bourdieu’s analysis leads us “to describe the different ways of temporalizing oneself, relating them to their economic and social conditions of possibility” (2000, 224). He refers here to the relative fullness or emptiness of time, the degree to which time is filled with activity that both manifests and contributes to certain social and economic conditions. ‘Temporalization’ reflects the formation of the habitus: always-already expectant. Modern times are modern because they express historically (and culturally) contingent temporalizations of the self: pluralized relations between time and agency are definitive manifestations of modernization.

The significance of the margins, of the boundaries of fields, becomes clearer in this view of temporalization. According to Bourdieu, unemployment creates “people without a future” who have

lost the countless tokens of a socially known and recognized *function*. . . . Deprived of this objective universe of incitements and indications which orient and stimulate action and, through it, social life, they [the unemployed] can only experience the free time that is left to them as dead time, purposeless and meaningless. If time seems to be annihilated, this is because employment is the support, if not the source, of most interests, expectations, demands, hopes, and investments in the present, and also in the future or the past that it implies, in short one of the major foundations of *illusio* in the sense of involvement in the game of life, in the present, the primordial investment which . . . creates time and indeed *is* time itself. (Bourdieu 2000, 222)

There appears to be a problem with Bourdieu’s conceptualization here: the marginalized are defined by relation to the field on whose margins they stand. Once the dominance of the state—the extent of the field of power—is questioned, the issue of boundaries between fields is more pressing. Marginalization is externality to the differential distribution of capital within a field. The field’s ‘autonomy’ is a characteristic of that distribution, and the extension of this concept to positions of negative capital seems problematic. The concept of negative symbolic capital marks certain people as ‘outside the loop.’ Yet it posits that those who stand outside the circuit of capital circulation are still somehow within the field. This is substantially different from saying that these people are no longer part of the field: it defines the marginalized still in terms of field-specific species of capital. In a similar way, Bourdieu’s view of dead time posits that those who stand outside the circuit of capital are still defined in terms of that circuit: paid labour remains the measure of their temporalization. In both cases, the periphery is measured by the values of the field’s structural axis. At the very least, it is worth raising questions regarding potential participation in a conflicting plurality of competing social forms. Bourdieu’s monolithic account of the state as the primary agent of consecration can be supplemented by addressing other agents of consecration at the margins.

In the face of an increasing sense of contingency and insecurity and a

decreasing ability of the state to address this development, it seems at least plausible to agree with Graham Murdoch that, “—the loss of faith in ‘progress,’ the intensified sense of meaningless[ness] at the heart of modernity, and the consumer system’s increasing inability to compensate—have enlarged the space through which religion can reenter the mainstream of private and public life” (1997, 95). Bourdieu’s analysis does not take sufficient account of the manner and degree of differentiation that the habitus experiences in radically new conditions in late-modernity. We live in a plurality of modern times that invoke a plurality of sites of consecration, and religion is one of these sites.

Religion and the Time of the Gift

Clarifying religion’s resurgent role as an agent of consecration in (late-) modernity involves extending this re-examination of temporality in Bourdieu’s first account of modernization (differentiation) to its role in his second account (gift and market). An overly centralized and monolithic account of the state in the first case obscures the multiplicity of sites of consecration in an era of glocalization. In the second case, his account draws on an overly narrow empirical contrast between traditional and modern societies, Kabylia and France, and this obscures temporality’s role in pre-modern religion. This can be made clear by considering the case of late-medieval and early modern Christianity in Western Europe. Confronting Bourdieu’s analysis with this case brings out how temporalization allows religion to function as an agent of consecration.

The sort of sharp contrast between traditional and modern societies that Bourdieu drew from his two sharply contrasting empirical cases has been strongly critiqued as unrealistically sharp (e.g., Moseley and Wallerstein 1978). This raises the possibility that considering another case, one that adds nuances to Bourdieu’s stark contrast between Kabylia and France, might enrich his account of modernization. Specifically, we will interrogate the relation between social distance and the distribution of capital in medieval societies.

The place of medieval societies in the contrast between traditional and modern societies is complex. Bourdieu isolates three causal factors contributing to modernization: monetarization, the commodification of labour, and urbanization:

Urbanization, which brings together groups with different traditions and weakens the reciprocal controls (and even before urbanization, the generalization of monetary exchanges and the introduction of wage labour), results in the collapse of the collectively maintained and therefore entirely real fiction of the religion of honour. (1990a, 110; cf. 1991, 6)⁷

However, medieval societies in Western Europe were intermediate in each of these

⁷ At a few points, Bourdieu comes close to recognizing the importance of medieval society as an empirical case for his views of modernization. He notes, drawing on Georges Duby, “The spaces and places occupied in medieval society by the king, the knight and the priest, are now shared by the bureaucrat, the businessman, the journalist, the professor, the bishop, the media consultant, the lawyer, the artist, etc.” (Bourdieu 1993, 36; cf. 1989, 540).

respects: partially urbanized (Weber 1978); partially monetarized (Little 1978; Weber 1978, 124; Coleman 1988, 610); partially oriented to wage labor (Ovitt 1987; Dyer 1989); and, more generally, partially differentiated (Bloch 1961; cf. Bendix 1978, 201).

More specifically, and more relevant to the issue of religion, the case of late-medieval and early modern charity forces us to supplement Bourdieu's analyses of gifting in traditional societies or market relations in modern societies.⁸ In the former case, he holds that gifting marks out a sphere of social proximity; in the latter, monetary relations extend throughout society and processes of marking social distance take place within increasingly differentiated and autonomous fields. In medieval and early-modern Western European societies, however, charity was a gift that did not mark social proximity: it performed the function of consecration that Bourdieu links to the concept of the field of power and it did so in a broad and effective way analogous to his account of the modern state.

The key point is that gifting relations are not necessarily confined to relations among 'us' as opposed to 'them.' In traditional societies, according to Bourdieu, the gift marks relations between those who are socially close and the market extends to strangers (1990a, 115). The prominence of gift, time, and uncertainty, is inversely proportional to social distance. However, in the case of many religious transactions (with late-medieval and early modern charity as just one example) the same element of time and uncertainty that Bourdieu finds at the heart of the gift reappears, but with two important differences: the temporal deferral extends to the afterlife; and the gift crosses a wide social gulf.

Looking more closely at the case of late-medieval and early modern almsgiving will supplement Bourdieu's analysis by clarifying the role that charity played in legitimizing social difference. Throughout the medieval and early modern periods, sermons and works of popular religious literature emphasized that charity was an exchange, involving both transcendent and worldly returns, and including God in the transactional circuit: charitable gifts were described as investments that would bear abundant fruit (Engler 1998, 117ff.). This return could be repaid either in the here and now or in an indefinite future in heaven. On the one hand, model donors miraculously received worldly rewards of food or the return of an amputated limb (Rubin 1987, 90). On the other hand, anticipation of transcendent returns was expressed in frequent statements to the effect that "Whatever is given to the poor is lent to the Lord, and he will repay that truly in the kingdom of heaven, with no small advantage" (Lupton 1583, sig. B8v).

Arguments for almsgiving were closely connected with a belief that the prayers of the poor, given in return for alms, were especially beneficial. Robert Brinton, a fourteenth-century Bishop of Rochester, preached that "the rich pay and the poor pray" (Moisa 1982, 165). Sixteenth-century puritan minister Samuel Bird made views of this transaction explicit: "[T]he poor being such as God hath promised to give the hearing unto, it is therefore a greater benefit than we take it to be, to have them pray for us. . . .

⁸ Western European Christianity stands in for 'pre-modern religion' here, but the argument can be generalized. Cross-cultural analyses of religious gifting are especially effective for illustrating that the contrast between gift and market is historically and culturally determined and that its relation to the contrast between societal types is much more complex than Bourdieu's analysis suggests (Parry and Bloch 1989; cf. Strathern 1988, 18).

[T]he Lord hath put a blessing into the hands of distressed persons, to bestow upon such as do relieve them . . .” (1598, 98, 95).

The exchange of alms for prayers was a transaction that spanned, and in so doing legitimized, social difference. The circuit of the alms transaction passed from rich, to poor, to Christ, and back to the rich. From the perspective of the donors, the return was favour from heaven, but this was bestowed only conditionally and at some indefinite future time (cf. Derrida 1995, 97ff.). The gift of alms above all other gifts held time and uncertainty in its hand. Almsgiving was perceived as the first element of a transaction, and the counter-gift remained pending indefinitely, stamped with a divine ‘IOU.’ God paid interest, but only after all worldly social relations, including those with the poor, had been transcended.

In this way, late-medieval and early modern charity invested social hierarchy with the cachet of eternal order. It legitimized and naturalized the gulf between rich and poor. In Bourdieu’s terms, it was a paradigmatic act of consecration: the exchange of prayers for alms was a form of gift-exchange that transformed “arbitrary relations of exploitation . . . into durable relations” through an institutionally legitimized misrecognition (Bourdieu 1990a, 112).

Late-medieval and early modern charity legitimized social distinction in a more diffuse manner than the modern state. This suggests a supplement to Bourdieu’s analysis, a more nuanced contrast between gift and market relations, between traditional and modern societies: the role that the time of the gift plays in legitimizing social difference. Late-medieval and early modern charity converted economic and religious capital in a circuit of exchange that included God and eternity. This relational tension between rich and poor was a primary axis of pre-modern society, and role of religion as an agent of consecration here was not a minor one.⁹

The modern state, “realization of God on earth,” offers a legitimation of social distinction that is transcendent only insofar as the field of power transcends other important fields, providing a calculable time-scale for the conversion of economic and symbolic capital (2000, 245; cf. 1994). The case of late-medieval and early modern charity illustrates that pre-modern religion was a transcendent agent of consecration in a different sense. It did not stand as a meta-field above a plurality of autonomous fields. Its transcendent position with respect to other fields—fields only beginning to differentiate during this time—was due in large part to its naturalization of social difference through temporal deferral. Including Christ in the pattern of circulation sacralized—consecrated—the relational distinction between those with and those without economic capital. It did so in terms that shifted the focus from economic to religious capital, from worldly to spiritual riches: “Thou beholdest the poor that are sick or lame: . . . these, for ought which thou knowest, may be the true members of Jesus

⁹ In late-medieval and early modern Europe, ‘the poor’ defined a social space in relative terms. For Bourdieu, classes are defined relationally not intrinsically: classes are “sets of agents who, by virtue of the fact that they occupy similar positions in social space (that is, in the distribution of powers), are subject to similar conditions of existence and conditioning factors and, as a result, are endowed with similar dispositions which prompt them to develop similar practices” (1987b, 6). Relational views of rich and poor are implicit in contemporary sources. Theologians of the Middle Ages, unlike the Church Fathers, argued that gradations in social status brought with them a hierarchy of needs: hence, the rich were not obligated to give alms if doing so would limit their ability to live up to the conventional standard of living of their class (Viner 1978, 24).

Christ. If then though dost neglect and despise them, though dost neglect and despise Christ” (Gifford 1598, 29).

Bourdieu has taken several important steps towards providing a valuable account of the role of religion in the twenty-first century: his concept of consecration links beliefs, actions, and social difference in an effective relational frame. However, when he characterizes the time of the stigmatized, marginalized, or unemployed as dead time, he seems to hesitate before a final step: recognizing that where employment and the state fail to link the habitus to economic expectations, religion can link it to soteriological expectations.¹⁰

A broader empirical base adds to Bourdieu’s contrast between gift and market, extending his analysis of temporality’s role in exchange relations. The key concepts of habitus and field have further insights to offer in this broader context. Tensions between high-capital and low-capital positions are relational in a dynamic sense. As a result, time, as a dimension of exchange relations, is a factor mediating capital and social difference. Transactions both reflect and reinforce social difference. This is illustrated by the potential of the early modern religious economy of almsgiving to legitimize social difference. Capital circulates, and symbolic transactions involving one sort can naturalize social positioning in ways that restrict the sphere of circulation of others sorts.

Bourdieu’s analysis of the gift offers a valuable insight concerning boundaries here: the indefinite time of the gift is between us; the calculation of the market is with them. The boundary between two spheres of circulation is marked by differential temporalization. Extending this to fields prompts us to consider cases of conversions between types of capital differently integrated with the temporalized habitus and its structured expectations. When capital expectations in the field of power fail in the face of glocalization, religion (perhaps only one possibility among many alternative sites of consecration) provides a circuit of capital where deferral reduces the tension of unmet expectations. There is a temporal dimension to Bourdieu’s claim that “theodicies are always *sociodicies*” (1991, 16). For Bourdieu, social change is a function of the relation between habitus and field; and the temporality of the habitus, the in-formed expectation of a specific state, can, in time, orient agency to forms of capital where temporal deferral frames less dissonant expectations.

For example, fundamentalisms and many other growing religious traditions reconsecrate social difference by orienting expectation to a different transactional framework. They reframe human activity as a transaction with the sacred, a transaction in which a transcendent gift and deferral legitimizes an alternative social form. In the case of Pentecostalism in Brazil, for example, Manuel A. Vasquez (1998) argues that the consequences of capitalism in the 1980s (stagflation, structural adjustment, and social-

10 The case might be extended beyond religion to, for example, social movements. However, religion seems in some ways unique (not *sui generis*, but at an interesting end of the spectrum of temporal deferral). This is a useful point of contrast with rational choice theory of religion. Religion offers what Stark and Bainbridge call “general compensators”: “postulations of reward ... which substitute for a cluster of many rewards and for rewards of great scope and value” (1996, 36). The embodied stance of Bourdieu’s structured-agent is quite different from Stark and Bainbridge’s rational *homo oeconomicus*, but religious goods on either account are exceptionally valuable and exceptionally deferred. Bourdieu’s ‘habitus’ and ‘capital’ offer a rich (if less axiomatic) account of this temporality, anchoring expectation with an eye to social difference, ideology, and embodiment.

economic insecurity) led to a legitimation crisis, in which mechanisms for effective political action were blocked and delegitimized. Existing possibilities for and conceptions of agency were forcibly altered under the impact of economic globalization (among other factors), and thousands have turned to Pentecostalism for more concrete and immediate legitimation of their experiences in the face of personal and community crises.

Bourdieu characterizes modern religion as one of the few areas of society that did not “break away from the gift economy” (2000, 196). He also tells us that “The representation of the relation between man and the supernatural powers proposed by different religions *cannot exceed the limits* imposed by the logic governing the exchange of goods in the group or class being considered” (Bourdieu 1991, 15 [1971, 311]).¹¹ But he does not capitalize on his own insights here: the missing lesson of the gift is its power of consecration through projecting the logic of exchange onto the indefinite time of the sacred.¹² Religion has the power to inscribe social difference in the transcendent moment between agency and salvation, and this power becomes all the more important when the state fails as an agent of consecration.

Conclusion

Weber’s sociology of religion was a springboard for Bourdieu’s key concepts of field and capital. Religion was also the central case in his extension of these concepts to those of the field of power and consecration as the characteristic function of the state in modernity. Yet, this paper has argued, Bourdieu’s account of modernization is limited in two ways: its monolithic view of the state obscures the many sites of consecration in our fragmented world where local social movements stand outside or over against dominant globalizing trends; and its stark account of the distinction between traditional and modern societies, between gift and market, further obscures the power of religion as an agent of consecration.

We have brought two empirical elements into a brief dialogue with Bourdieu’s ideas: social fragmentation in late-modernity and medieval and early-modern charity. The first case suggests that Bourdieu pays little attention to alternative sites of consecration at the margins of the state, yet his perspective offers insights there. The second case adds to his account of time and the gift, raising the possibility that religion

¹¹ The published translation reads “*can exceed the limits*” (1991, 15) where the original is “*ne peut dépasser les limites*” [1971, 311]. Bryan Turner makes a related claim that “the forms of exchange which are constituent of economic life in human societies provide the metaphors by which human actors conceptualise their relationship with the gods” (1991, 104).

¹² This concept of ‘transcendent deferral’ is not committed to an essentialist, sui generis, or realist view of religion. That is, there is no need to assume that all religions share a common essence (e.g., mediation between humanity and ‘the sacred’), nor that religions are distinct from other social phenomena, nor that any supernatural or spiritual realm exists. (On the other hand, there is no need to dispute these views; they play no role on this limited stage.) ‘Transcendent deferral’ could be defined, for example, in transactional terms. Anthropologists Jonathan Parry and Maurice Bloch point to a structural characteristic common to certain classes of exchange relations in societies around the world: an almost universal concern with “the relationship between a cycle of short-term exchange which is the legitimate domain of individual--often acquisitive--activity, and a cycle of long-term exchanges concerned with the reproduction of the social and cosmic order” (Parry and Bloch 1989, 2; cf. Engler 1998, 277ff.).

has the potential to step in to fill this gap.

As a result, it is possible to extend Bourdieu's analyses in a way that highlights the role of religion in modernity. By linking human beliefs, agency, and social relations to the transcendent time of a soteriological economy, religion remains a powerful agent of consecration. Once augmented in these ways, Bourdieu's theoretical apparatus offers a powerful set of analyses for the study of religion today. In the end, he can be faulted perhaps only for not following through on his initial insight that religion remains a vital subject for the approach that he pioneered.

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