Religion and Social Class: Theory and Method After Bourdieu

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Abstract

This article outlines two inter-related but distinct theoretical approaches to the study of Christianity and Social Class developed from the work of Pierre Bourdieu. The first is a model derived from *Distinction* (Bourdieu [1979] 1984), the second comes from Bourdieu's work on religious fields with a focus on the conversion of capital between different fields. The former, better known, approach has the potential to provide important insights, including identifying the affinity of different religious groups with different class locations; on the other hand, this would tell us little about the internal workings of religious communities; it is also unfortunately hampered by a lack of suitable data. The conception of fields and their inter-relations will not answer the questions about the affinity of particular class fragments for particular kinds of religiosity, but it does provide much keener insight into the operation of class within religious communities, by examining the conversion of different types of capital into religious capital. This is illustrated with an extended Bourdieusian hypothesis, a schematic outline that could be used as the starting point for empirical research on the operation of different kinds of capital in the Church of England.

Keywords: Religion, Class, Bourdieu, Cultural Capital, Field, Habitus, Christianity, Anglican, Church of England, Bishops

Introduction

- 1.1 The virtual absence of social class in the sociology of religion is almost as mysterious as it is telling. Long one of the central organising concepts in the discipline as a whole (particularly in the UK), there has been a dearth of discussion about class in the sociology of religion, just as class analysis has been markedly inattentive to the role of religion in the formation of classes and class subjectivities. While the classical sociological tradition, which has provided much of the conceptual infrastructure for the sociology of religion, provides indispensable starting points for the analysis of social class and its relation to religion, the legacy Marx and Weber have bequeathed to us are not entirely without its problems. Here, I conceptualise the relationship between religion and social class as synthesized by Pierre Bourdieu. His work offers a more satisfying and up-to-date starting point for reconsidering the relationship between religion and social class, at a time when students of social class have come to recognise the ways in which class and culture are mutually constitutive.
- 1.2 This article outlines two inter-related but irreducible theoretical approaches to the study of Christianity and Social Class following from the work of Pierre Bourdieu. The first is a model that can be derived from *Distinction* (Bourdieu [1979] 1984), Bourdieu's most influential work. The second, developed at length here grows out of Bourdieu's work on religious fields and on the conversion of capital between different fields. I argue that while the former approach has the potential to provide important insights, including identifying the affinity of different religious groups with different class locations, it is much more limited in what it can help us to understand about the internal workings of religious communities; it is also unfortunately hampered by a lack of suitable data. The theory of fields, by contrast, will not tell us as much about the affinity of particular class positions and particular religious identifications. It will, however, provide much more powerful insight into class influence within religious communities, by examining the conversion of different types of capital into religious

capital. This latter approach is illustrated by way an extended Bourdieusian hypothesis, a schematic outline that could be used as the starting point for empirical research on the operation of different kinds of capital in the Church of England.

Religion and Social Class in Classical Sociology

2.1 Marx himself wrote relatively little about religion, and still less about his analysis of how the relationship between class and religion could be conceived; much of what he did write has been very much misconstrued. Both within and beyond Marxist sociology, the depiction of this relationship has often been reduced to a crude misinterpretation of the famous phrase 'the opium of the people' (McKinnon 2005), or else to the general thesis that religion, as a form of ideology, distracts the working-class from its innate revolutionary urges. The argument that religion has a predominantly quiescent effect is not entirely wrong, but it radically over-simplifies Marx, removing his dialectical backbone and failing to recognise that religion is a contradictory phenomenon. Religion sometimes foments social protest and rebellion as well, even if sporadically (Boer 2011, 2012). If we do not understand that contradiction, it is hard to make much sense of the 14th or 16th Century peasants' revolts in England, and then across much of Europe, the beliefs of Gerard Winstanley's "Diggers", the Civil Rights movement in the 20th Century US, or the Liberation Theology across South and Central America, to choose a few more or less random examples. Orthodox Marxist understandings of religion have also been dogged by a fairly embarrassing empirical problem: even in the nineteenth century, proletarians have not shown greater religiosity than the bourgeoisie (McLeod 1984, 1996; Demerath 1965).

2.2 Marx's long-time collaborator, Friedrich Engels provides a more comprehensive, and in certain respects, a more empirically satisfying, sociology of religion, particularly in his study of the Peasant Revolts (see Engels 1966; Boer 2012). That book does not presume that religion is either quiescent or something to which the lower orders are more prone; rather Engels looks at what kind of religiosity different classes and class fractions tend to produce. Engels provides a fairly compelling descriptive analysis of the various strands of the Reformation in terms of their class locations. For Engels, however, religion is ultimately little more than a reflection of the ideals and hopes of particular social classes; in other words, his analysis of religion and social class is in the last instance fairly narrowly reductionist: beliefs are produced by class relations.

2.3 Max Weber picks up from Engels, largely accepting and expanding on his description of what kind of religion goes with what social classes, as did H Richard Niebuhr (1929) some years later, omitting Engels' class reductionism. Weber argued that different religious expressions are more easily articulated with the lived experience of different social classes. In this, Weber is drawing as much on Nietzsche's *Genealogy of Morality* as much as he is responding to Marx and Engels. Nietzsche, for example, argued that the religiosity of traditional European élites (the warrior nobles) was quite indifferent to the question of salvation (Nietzsche [1887] 1994); this stands in stark contrast to humbler groups who experience an acute awareness of their need for salvation, in both this- and other-worldly terms. In both his comparative ethics on the world religions and in the posthumously published *Economy and Society* (1978) Weber argues that certain classes and status groups (*Ständen*) have tended to act as 'carriers' of particular kinds of religion, and this is as important for the success of religious ideas and practices as it is for the groups that embody them. Thus: non-salvation religious ethics for living a good life (such as Confucianism) have tended to have an elective affinity with literate elites; early Islam was carried by a conquering warrior class; Christianity by itinerant and later urban artisans (1949 p. 268-9). Particular religious tendencies were carried by classes and social groups with particular life experience, but the groups were also shaped by their religious convictions, beliefs, and practices. Werner Stark summarises this nicely; the social world, he says:

is no place for disembodied spirits; even ideas must have bodies if they are to last, and so they are on the lookout for appropriate social groupings who can take them in and carry them along. But human groupings, of whatever kind, will, for their part, always be on the lookout for appropriate ideas to give expression to their essence and their strivings, for, material as this life is, it nevertheless has a spiritual side to it (1958, p. 257).

2.4 The relationship between carriers and their religious beliefs and practices are (at least in potential) mutually constitutive. The 'practical rationalism' of urban commercial groups whose 'whole existence has been based upon technological or economic calculations and upon the mastery of nature and of man...' (Weber 1949:238) made the teachings of the Protestant Reformation appealing to these groups; the 'practical rationalism' of the urban commercial groups also shaped Protestant beliefs and practices.

Bourdieu's sociology of religion and culture

3.1 Pierre Bourdieu's sociology combines many of the respective strengths and insights of Marx, Weber, as

well as Durkheim (among others) in a potent and sophisticated synthesis. While Bourdieu's writings about culture and its relation to class are both extensive and well known, Bourdieu wrote comparatively little about religion per se- and almost exclusively during the early 1970s (Rey 2007). There is a good argument to be made that all of Bourdieu's writings on culture have a strong affinity with the study of religion; Terry Rey notes the importance of terms like transubstantiation, consecration, orthodoxy and theodicy in Bourdieu's thinking about ostensibly 'secular' fields (Rey 2007: 8). Bourdieu himself noted that his sociology of culture is the sociology of religion adapted to comprehend a secular world, and in this he adapts a strategy first developed by Emile Durkheim (McKinnon 2013).

3.2 Bourdieu's sociology developed and changed over the course of a long and productive career. Here I will suggest that there are two distinct, bourdieusian sociologies we can use to conceptualise the relationship between religion and class, each of which allows us to examine this nexus from a different angle. The first is the sociology of culture one finds in *Distinction* ([1979] 1984); the second is found in his sociology of 'fields'. In the first of these two sociologies, the concept of 'field' is marginal; in the second, it becomes a capstone concept. Although the 'field' does appear in *Distinction*, as Alan Warde insightfully observes, the concept does negligible work: all the heavy lifting is done by *economic capital*, *cultural capital*, and *habitus*, with *social capital* offering a helping hand when its services are required (2004). These two different approaches to looking at religion and class work at different levels of abstraction, and offer different insights into the way that they are articulated. Particularly since it does not require the collection of large, and preferably representative datasets, and given the insight it provides into the operation of religious institutions and groups, I suggest that the sociology of fields has more to offer those engaged in empirical fieldwork studying religious communities, at present the dominant style of research in the UK.

Religion as Cultural Capital

4.1 Bourdieu's most influential book, *Distinction* ([1979] 1984), is the product of a French national-scale study; in this book Bourdieu argues that class is not just an economic matter, but has an inextricable cultural and social dimension to it as well. As the book's subtitle title indicates, the argument is first and foremost is a 'social critique of the judgement of taste': there is nothing objective about the hierarchical differences in judgement about taste, these cultural distinctions are used to reproduce social distinctions. To distinguish between good and bad, refined and vulgar, sophisticated and common, things that are posh and those that are 'for folk like us', stuffy and cheerful, respectable and chavvy, is to tell us more about the person making the distinction than it does about the cultural objects or practices themselves.

4.2 Bourdieu's book is a rich and theoretically subtle argument, but the basic contention is quite simple: culture is a site of contest between classes and class-fractions. A feel for consecrated cultural forms ('highbrow culture'), as well as good manners and bodily comportment, sets up boundaries and barriers that make some people belong in some places and social circles, and others to feel out of place and ill at ease. This has obvious consequences for the ability to build relationships with people who may be able to convey various forms of benefit, which Bourdieu refers to as *social capital*: 'it isn't what you know, but who you know that matters'. Elite schooling and a place at a good Oxbridge college matters for one's life chances, not only because of the official and unofficial curriculum, but because of the social connections, the 'old boys' networks' that are formed there. *Distinction* provides a theoretical framework not simply for understanding the organisation of social classes from high to low, but also for distinguishing different class fractions, particularly on the basis of both the kind and the amount of social and cultural capital individuals possess. Thus, Bourdieu helps us to make sense of the class conflicts between those who have 'new money' but lack the 'refinement' of those more established, or indeed, between the uncultured rich, and those who have limited economic capital, but may have substantial cultural capital. Under-paid, over-cultured academics' contempt for the business class is often fuelled by the resentment such difference provokes: academics find it easy to hold in contempt those who have more money than they do, but don't know how to spend it well.

4.3 Actors are endowed with differing amounts of capital, but they act largely on the basis of their *habitus*, described by Bourdieu as 'a lasting, generalised and transposable disposition to act in conformity with a (quasi-) systematic view of the world and human existence' (1987: 126). Bourdieu typically refers to the *habitus* as a 'structuring structure': it is both the matrix of perception for the actor and his or her 'feel for the game', a set of skills and dispositions for playing the game with the amount of capital at their disposal. Strategies for accumulating capital are seldom fully conscious, and are informed by the objective positions of the agents in the field. The positions, in turn, depend on the amount and relative value of the capital with which agents are equipped. People adjust and learn to love the things that they can afford—or, better, the things that they can *almost* afford.

- 4.4 While religion is largely absent from *Distinction*, as an aspect of culture, religion can be treated much as one would approach other cultural forms (Geertz 1973; McKinnon 2002; Guest 2007; Lynch 2012). We could analyse the place of different kinds of religion just as one would different aspects of lifestyle (taste in art, music, clothes, entertainment, food, travel). Religious commitments would then take their place on the same grid, marking out devotees as people with high/low cultural, social and economic capital, corresponding to the different classes and class-fractions in a given society. Such an analysis would provide interesting answers to Weber's questions about the elective affinity of different classes and class fractions for different religious belief and practice in the contemporary period. The down-side is that such an exercise would tend to both eliminate anything particularly religious about such identifications; neither would it offer limited insight into what happens *within* churches, sects and denominations in relation to social class.
- 4.5 A second limitation to using Bourdieu's framework from *Distinction* ([1979] 1984) is a lack of suitable secondary data on which such an analysis could be based—and for Bourdieu, this would require the quantitative analysis of (multiple) correspondences. *Distinction* has of course been extremely influential, perhaps nowhere more so than in Britain, providing key theoretical tools for the cultural turn in the study of social class (Savage et al 1995; Bennett et al 2009; Savage et al 2013). These discussions have tended to ignore religion's role as social and cultural capital. It is of course possible that that Britain has become sufficiently secular that, in the aggregate, religion no longer makes any difference to the formation and maintenance of boundaries between social classes and class fractions, even if it clearly did so in the past (Thompson 1963; Davidoff and Hall 1987: 76-148; McLeod 1984, 1996). Particularly unfortunate is the complete omission of questions about religious belief, identity, or participation in the 'Great British Class Survey' (Savage et al 2013), a survey for which there are more than sufficient respondents (over 326,000 responded to the online survey) to have examined the relationship between religion and social class, even taking into account the small proportion of individuals who are regular religious participants. Despite accusations that the analysis of the Great Class Study amounts to little more than data-dredging (Mills 2014), the irrelevance of religion was a clearly a theoretical assumption given in advance. Since many more people attend church, and more regularly, than attend the opera, such an assumption is at very least, open to question.
- 4.6 Where recent Bourdieu-inspired surveys of class have asked questions about religious identification, like the Cultural Capital and Social Exclusion study (Bennett et al 2009) this is limited to denominational identification and participation to attendance. Unfortunately, as sociologists of religion know, denominational identity is a variable for religious identification that will only get you so far. It captures only some of what we would expect to be class-salient social cleavages (Protestant versus Catholic, for instance). Outside of Northern Ireland, post-denominational religious identities, like evangelicalism, liberalism, fundamentalism, or Pentecostalism, are at least as important. These very often cut across religious denominations (at least the bigger ones) at least as much as they are bounded by them. So, for example, The Church of England is a broad tent containing all of these constituencies (and more) set at odds with each other over theological, moral and social issues. It is difficult to imagine that the responses of these groups to the issues of the day are not imbued with the inter-laced with class positions, but without data on these questions, it is equally difficult to identify with any precision how. The category 'Anglican/Church of England' certainly misses them. The omission of relevant religion questions on class studies leaves us unable to ask the Bourdieusian (or Weberian) question of what affinity of certain religious identities and practices have with particular classes and class fractions^[1].
- 4.7 If class analysis has tended to neglect religion as a component of cultural capital, sociologists of religion have tended to focus their attention more on religious congregations as sources of social—as opposed to bearers of cultural—capital (Ammerman 2005; Baker 2010). Evidence from representative samples, at least in the US, is mixed (Greeley 1997; Wuthnow 2002). Further, this is typically framed more in terms of Putnam's conception of social capital (1995) than Bourdieu's—which is to say that capital is understood as providing capacities, but the exclusionary role of capital, essential to Bourdieu's understanding, are cast aside. The prevailing assumptions are liberal rather than critical, and tend somewhat to accentuate religion's positive contribution.
- 4.8 Some important empirical research has begun to comprehend the boundary work and mechanisms of distinction at work in British churches. Research on middle-class Conservative Evangelicals have shown how it is difficult for middle-class conservative evangelical churches to reach those who are excluded by their own distinctions; this is a source of spiritual anxiety for at least some members and leaders (Strhan 2013, 2015; McKenzie 2015). Ethnographic studies cannot of course be asked to locate a religious tradition (in this case, conservative evangelical Anglicans) on a class map such as the one proposed in *Distinction* (1984). Without a

large-scale, and preferably representative, quantitative data, where multiple correspondences can be analysed, we have no way of knowing, for example, if there is a particular affinity between, say, conservative evangelical religion, and the new-middle class. It could well be the case, for example, that all religion among non-immigrant Britons has a middle class bias; among Anglicans, some of these will be liberal, some catholic, some evangelical, and so forth. It is also difficult to see what such a broad conception of cultural capital, as we find it in *Distinction*, would really add to the rich and subtle fieldwork such as we find in these recent studies. Such research is, however, suggestive of the kind of inquiries that could be suitably paired with the second of the two approaches to studying religion and social class that we can extract from Bourdieu's work.

Religion as a 'field' in relation to other fields

5.1 Bourdieu sketched the rudiments of the concept of 'field' in the early nineteen seventies, drawing from his study of Max Weber's sociology of religion (Bourdieu [1971a] 1987c; [1971b] 1991; 1982; 1987a; 1987b [2010]). The field only became one of Bourdieu's central guiding concepts later, however, amounting to a significant reorientation of his empirical work. This is easily, and often is, missed given the overlap in terminology between the two theoretical schemas. Here I am not going to focus so much on Bourdieu's writings on religious fields per se, which are important, and not nearly well enough known, partly since they have not all been translated, even if they should not be applied to rigidly to other contexts (see McKinnon, Brittain and Trzebiatowska 2011). Here, I will turn here more generally to Bourdieu's more general conception of fields, and, and in particular, their inter-relations. This, I argue has considerably the potential to shed new light on the relation between religion and social class, particularly considered as a multidimensional relationship.

5.2 A field (*champ*) is an analytic metaphor that develops the notions of force field, as well as battle-field. It is a complex metaphor, and Bourdieu was always reluctant to delimit the use of the concept with a 'professorial definition' (Bourdieu 1992: 95). Loïc Wacquant nevertheless provides a reasonably concise summation of the idea of a 'field' in a book co-authored with Bourdieu. Wacquant writes:

A field is simultaneously a space of conflict and competition, the analogy here being with a battlefield, in which participants vie to establish monopoly over the species of capital effective in it—cultural authority in the artistic field, scientific authority in the scientific field, sacerdotal authority in the religious field, and so forth—and the power to decree the hierarchy and 'conversion rates' between all forms of authority in the field of power. In the course of these struggles, the very shape and divisions of the field become a central stake, because to alter the distribution and relative weight of forms of capital is tantamount to modifying the structure of the field (1992: 17-18).

5.3 In Bourdieu's later work, what counts as capital is always field specific, and the field is defined by the dominant form of capital within that field. Thus, economic capital is the predominant form of capital over which actors in the economic field struggle; scientific capital is the object of contest in the academic field; cultural capital defines the field of cultural production, and so forth^[2]. In non-economic fields, capital is an analytic metaphor: it plays a role in that particular field analogous to economic capital plays in the economic field (on the logic of metaphors, see McKinnon 2012). While the stakes, the rules, boundaries and the particular forms of struggle, will not be the same in different fields, capital is always a resource that can be used to maintain or improve one's position in that particular field.

5.4 At any time, the current size, shape, arrangements and boundaries of a given field will reflect the history of struggles in that field for particular forms of capital (Swartz 1996: 79-81). Agents and institutions deploy strategies in their attempts to gain and maintain control of a field's capital, and these struggles shape and reshape the basic dimensions of the field. Every field is hierarchical because capital cannot be evenly distributed, and this is particularly true of symbolic forms of capital which cannot be divided and shared; this may be one reason for the intensity of religious conflicts (Kniss 1997; Brittain and McKinnon 2011). This is also why "Sayre's law" (the politics in academia are so intense because the stakes are so low (Yarn 2014) is wrong: it fundamentally misunderstands the kind of capital which matters in that field.

5.5 In his writings on religion of the 1970s where Bourdieu first conceived of the 'field', he argues that the religious field emerges by developing relative autonomy from the political field. However, the only way an enduring monopoly over the goods of salvation can be achieved, Bourdieu argues, is through the operation of a bureaucratic apparatus, which continuously routinizes charisma, with the support of state power (Rey 2007: 77-78). In exchange, Bourdieu argues, the religious field typically legitimises the logic of the hierarchical ordering of the political and economic fields.

5.6 Although it is framed as a universal theory of religious fields, Erwan Dianteill rightly observes that

'Bourdieu's sociology of religion is, first and foremost, a sociology of [French] Catholicism. The accent thus falls on the process of monopolization by a single institution: the Catholic Church' (2003: 535). Bourdieu's sociology of religion thus fits neatly with the dominant Republican tendencies of the French academy, which continued long after the French Catholic church lost its state sponsored monopoly status in 1905 (2003: 545). (The Roman Catholic Church nevertheless maintains, as a matter of dogma, its exclusive right to the monopoly over access to salvation—extra ecclesiam nulla salus, there is no salvation outside the church, even if its position has softened since the Second Vatican Council (1962-65).

5.7 Within the church, the priesthood maintains a sacerdotal monopoly, as the designated and exclusive authority for the administration of the sacraments: the Eucharist, baptism, reconciliation, confirmation, marriage, and ordination. Ordination, because it involves consecrating the consecrators, is a rite that can only be conducted by the bishops; the consecration of a bishop can only be performed by several bishops and with approval of the Pope. Bourdieu thinks that the laity only possesses enough religious capital to articulate their religious needs, but not enough to become players in the struggle over monopoly and legitimacy. Thus, he argues the laity misrecognise 'the arbitrariness of the monopolisation of a power in principle accessible to anyone' (1991: 25). Whether the laity do so misrecognise it, and whether that power is accessible to anyone, are by no means so definitively settled as Bourdieu seems to think.

5.8 Given the strong French Catholic accent in Bourdieu's sociology of religion, some sociologists have called into question the applicability of his thinking to other contexts, even to the Catholic Church elsewhere (Dillon 2003); others have argued that his work must be significantly reconfigured to account for more 'fluid' religious contexts (Verter 2003). Bourdieu himself recognises this with reference to other work. In the English-language preface to *Distinction*, Bourdieu warns against drawing overly mechanistic comparisons between different national cultural fields and the way that they organise stratification? 'Is Brigitte Bardot like Marilyn Monroe?', he asks (Bourdieu 1984: xii). Nonetheless, Bourdieu argues that the principles and concepts on which his analysis of the particular French system is based should be translatable from one situation into another. A similar caution ought to apply to Bourdieu's rather more fragmentary corpus of writings on religion, and the way in which it is translatable into religious fields that have emerged from a history of different struggles and have accordingly taken on different shapes. The religious field 'must not be conceived of as an immutable reality: a structural genesis exists for it in relation to transformations of social structure' (Diantell 2003: 544). Religious fields evolve over time, and do so differently according to local and national contexts, as the product of struggles, and reflecting the accumulated capital of the victors of those struggles. The general principles of Bourdieu's sociology demand that, since the structure of positions and the value of different forms of capital are the product of the history of struggle, one must take into account the way different fields are structured. They cannot be simply 'applied' without taking account of local variation.

5.9 Bradford Verter, who has criticized Bourdieu's relative inattention to the interconnection between different fields, argues that Bourdieu treats fields as an archipelago of islands, each being separate from, and largely independent of, the others (2003: 162). Verter's criticism seems when applied to much of Bourdieu's work, even if he has written about the 'field of power', the social space occupied by those with very high levels of capital in different fields, where they converge (most significantly in *Noblesse d'État* (1989)). Bourdieu has often argued that the relation between fields was an 'extremely complex' question, and one that he was reluctant to try to answer. He was always wary of the grand theorist's rigid schemas or of models that provide answers rather than relevant questions for empirical research.

5.10 Bourdieu's reticence to spell out these relations too schematically in many ways seems well advised. Because the relations between fields, just like the shape of particular fields are the products of struggle, are historically contingent (1992: 109). Verter himself proposes that we re-conceive fields and their inter-relations as circles in Venn diagrams; this is a potentially fruitful intervention in this under-specified area of Bourdieu's work, but it is not without its own problems. While Bourdieu does sometimes suggest that particular fields overlap, or even dissolve into one another, he consistently argues that the borders of fields are always a stake in the contest of the field itself. Each field has 'admission fees' that they exact from those who enter the field (1992:94-115), and just as different national currencies have different rates of exchange (which fluctuate and change over time relative to one another) so also are the different forms of capital exchangeable, but they will be evaluated differently in the move from one field to the next.

Fields and exchange of capital for thinking about religion and class

6.1 Understanding the nexus of religion and social class in contemporary pluralistic (and relatively secular) Britain requires careful empirical work, though a Bourdieusian theory of fields provides a useful set of concepts,

tools and questions for empirical research. Given the current state of the research literature on the subject, it is not possible at present to provide a detailed map of the relations between the religious field and other fields (politics, the economy, cultural production, the scientific field, and so forth) with a view to comprehending the intersection of religion and social class. An enterprise of this scope would require a body of empirical research attending to such questions much more extensive than has to date been conducted, even if there are reasons to be hopeful that this is changing (this special issue being one of those).

- 6.2** Here I want to provide a sketch that could constitute the starting point for researching the interaction of religion and social class examined from the perspective of Bourdieu's theory of fields. Of principal importance, I argue, is to attend carefully to the rate of exchange as capital is exchanged from one field into another. In other words, what does religious capital do for an actor crossing into the field of politics, science, cultural production, law, or business? Here I will look very briefly at the question of the exchange rate from religious to political capital. Then, I will turn the question around and consider, again necessarily briefly and tentatively, what substantial economic, political, cultural or scientific capital do for an actor in the religious field, mindful of the underdeveloped state of the body of research that could help us to be more definitive.
- 6.3** Unlike economic exchange of national currencies, where money transferred one way will be worth the same as the value of money transferred the other direction (once the company changing currencies has taken their cut), transfer of capitals between fields is not equal—its value depends on the direction of travel. Some currency, once transferred to another field, may be even worthless, or even have negative value in another field, while capital being exchanged in the other direction could be exceedingly powerful. There is little doubt that the value of religious capital has fallen in Britain, as in much of the rest of Europe. Mark Chaves (1991) has helpfully described secularization as the decline of religious authority, but we could also re-describe this as the decline in the value of religious capital. If we think about this in the very long-run, one can see that the weakening exchange rate of religious capital has been under way for a very long time: in Medieval Europe, the threat of excommunication had significant effects in fields well beyond the church; sacerdotal monopoly of religious capital could be used as a powerful tool to constrain the actions of the warrior classes, despite their horses, weapons, armies and riches. This was not necessarily because they feared hell and damnation, but because no longer being a communicant made a warrior leader vulnerable; they became a legitimate target against which Christian warriors could legitimately wage war, just as they felt justified in doing towards Muslims and pagans (McKinnon 2015).
- 6.4** Today, of course, religious capital is much less valuable for constraining the powerful in the political field—within the Christian West, excommunication is only practiced by politically marginal sects. Despite falling rates of exchange, religious capital has not become totally valueless. Twenty-six senior Church of England bishops still sit as Lords Spiritual in the second chamber of Parliament and a number of other religious leaders (Jewish, Methodist and Church of Scotland) been appointed to the House of Lords as Lords Temporal (along with former Church of England archbishops) because of their accumulation of religious capital. This is a clear-cut case of high levels of religious capital being converted to political capital: these leaders thereby have the ability to directly influence the affairs of the nation through the second chamber of Parliament. This arrangement, particularly by which the most senior bishops in the Church of England have their religious capital converted automatically into political capital has increasingly been called into question, and not only by secularist organisations, but also even by Conservative party leaders in government (Purvis 2011).
- 6.5** Beyond the exchange of capital on entry into the second chamber of parliament, religious capital clearly does not operate in the same way in Britain as it does in other countries (Bruce 2012a)- the United States being an obvious point of comparison (McCloud 2009). From the twentieth century, professions of faith by American presidents, while they are typically vague expressions of what Robert Bellah famously referred to as 'civil religion' (Bellah 1967), they have until recently at least, been necessary. Presidential candidates have had to claim some religious capital in order to have any chance of being elected to the office in the first place. By contrast Prime Minister Tony Blair's spin-doctor, Alastair Campbell, intervened during Blair's interview with Vanity Fair magazine. 'We don't do God', he repeatedly, and now famously, interjected (Brown 2003). The reason for this is clear—religious capital does not make good political capital in Great Britain. This is, of course, not to say that other actors are not making a concerted effort to improve the exchange rate in favour of religious capital, and especially particular forms of 'biblical' religious capital (Engelke 2013). Campbell was clearly concerned that by discussing his faith in public would cost Blair political capital. The exception of course is Northern Ireland where religious capital does translate into political capital, albeit in a highly segmented way (Fahey, Hayes and Sinnott 2005), where the coins of religious capital for one 'community' are not accepted in the other.

- 6.6 How do other forms of capital translate into religious capital, and what difference does this make within churches? The easiest place to begin is to think about the conversion of economic capital, because Churches, like all organisations, need money to sustain them. This is not just to pay the staff that perform services and clean the building, but to keep the roof nailed down and the boiler running. And for many churches, the boiler, the roof, staff salaries and the contribution to the diocese are always a source of worry. For that reason it is surprising how little of sociology of religion's labour has been devoted to understanding the role of money in the church, or the influence that accrues to those who provide it.
- 6.7 Patronage from the 'Big House' or from the Industrial Mansion were long important for building churches, staffing them, and keeping them running, though they have become unreliable sources of support for the church (Bruce 2012b). The revenue from traditional patrons may have declined^[3], but patronage also often entailed legal rights of patronage (including the right to have a say in the appointment of the parish priest). While the power of owning such benefices has been curtailed by the Patronage (Benefices) Measure 1986^[4], hundreds of these patronage rights have been bought up by groups, typically representing a 'party' in the church that want to exercise an influence over the appointment of priests in the Church of England. There are of course, less 'traditional' forms of patronage, as well. One often hears of 'successful' parishes many of whom are blessed not only with significant attendance, but also from well-wishers with very deep pockets. In the course of research for another project, I have visited several churches where such wealth was everywhere palpable—not least by the driver in uniform standing next to a Bentley in the parking lot, waiting to take someone of substance home to Sunday lunch. Many such churches make a significant contribution to diocesan coffers, and thereby feel entitled to greater influence over diocesan or national affairs in the life of the church. This includes, fundamentally, influence over the decision about who should be included in the church and have access to its rites and blessings ('the goods of salvation' in Bourdieu's terms), and who should be ordained to carry out the rites of the church. This has been particularly evident in recent debates about the ordination of gay clergy and the blessing of same-sex unions over the past number of years.
- 6.8 Of course there are limits to how much religious capital can be bought with economic capital. Even if it was common in Medieval Europe, the Christian Church has long seen buying church office, or the sin of Simony, as a serious offence^[5]. Indeed, there is no way at present to buy an episcopal office even with substantial economic capital at one's disposal. And yet, there is good evidence that bishops are much more likely to come from middle-class backgrounds (Morgan 1969; Medhurst and Moyser 1982)^[6]. How does this happen, in the absence of the ability to convert economic capital directly into religious capital?

God Calls a Bishop (does *habitus* choose them?)

- 7.1 In the Anglican tradition, no-one bears more religious capital than a bishop. Other traditions have their own ways of organising hierarchy, and we should not expect them to look the same. Here, I look at Church of England bishops as example; space does not permit comparison with other churches, some of which may have similar systems of organisation (such as the Roman Catholic Church) or a more fluid system of organisation, such as one would find in other denominations or sects.
- 7.2 In Bourdieu's terms, Anglican bishops possess not only the sacerdotal monopoly of the priesthood in matters of consecration, but exclusive rights of consecration of the consecrators. While bishops by no means have the unchallenged authority that they once had, due to the rise of synodical government, increasing legal constraint and bureaucratisation and the decrease in the value of religious capital, they are nonetheless without question the key players in a church that is led by the episcopate.
- 7.3 Not all bishops are equal in their possession of religious capital, of course; there is a pecking order from the Archbishop of Canterbury at the pinnacle, followed by York, and other particularly significant sees (derived from the Latin for a chair—referring to the bishop's throne), including London, Durham and Winchester. Together these five are guaranteed a place in the House of Lords; the longest serving diocesan bishops fill the remaining twenty-one places in the House of Lords. There are forty-two dioceses (including the diocese of Europe) each with its own diocesan bishop; many dioceses also have Suffragan or Area Bishops with primarily diocesan responsibilities, second to the Diocesan bishop, who once used to be able to appoint to these positions without outside consultation. Today these are subject to a formal procedure for selection and appointment.
- 7.4 The selection of Diocesan Bishops is, from a research point of view, something of a black box^[7]. While the rules by which diocesan bishops are selected are a matter of public record (cf Archbishop's Secretary for Appointments 2016), the deliberations, including the names proposed to the committee, those interviewed and

considered, is confidential to the committee (though rumours do of course sometimes circulate). Two names are forwarded by the nominations committee to the Prime-Minister's Office, one of which will be selected by the Prime Minister, approved by the Sovereign and announced by Number 10 Downing Street. So, while the process of selection is hidden, the outcome of the deliberations is known.

7.5 There is no application process, or means of putting oneself forward to become a diocesan bishop, nor would such ambitions be seen as appropriate for the 'humility' required of a shepherd of the souls of a diocese (Davies and Guest 2007: 78-81). Nevertheless, it would undoubtedly be possible to identify a career trajectory involving choices and positions for which one must apply that constitute the patterns of advancement before any priest receives an invitation to an interview from the Archbishop's Secretary for Appointments. These very often include stints as a tutor or administrator in a theological training centre, as archdeacons, cathedral deans or in a diocesan or national bureaucracy. While some are undoubtedly surprised—even mortified—to be approached, others have, consciously or not, been working towards this higher calling for many years. 'Consciously or not' is important, and corresponds to Bourdieu's conception of the *habitus* as a un- or semi-conscious structuring structure, and matrix through which an individual views the world, and the feel they have for how to play its various games.

7.6 Such a *habitus* has been a long time in the making. While, as a fraction of the dominant class, the status of Church of England bishops has been falling for quite some time (cf Morgan 1969; Medhurst and Moyer 1982). Most Church of England Bishops nevertheless come from considerable privilege. Davies and Guest in their study of the 'spiritual capital' of the episcopate, found 90% of the bishops in their study were from middle-class and professional families, with only 10% coming from working-class origins. They also found that almost 60% of them attended a public school, and 75% had attended Oxford or Cambridge. Only a very small fraction of the population have ever been educated at such elite institutions. As a point of comparison, 1.7% of all undergraduate students in the UK are currently enrolled at Oxbridge, and less than half of the population attend Higher Education (figures calculated from Higher Education Statistics Authority 2015).

7.7 The upper middle-class *habitus* shaped by high educational and cultural capital, structures not only the perception of the world and the self, and the choices one makes in light of those perceptions, but also the dispositions, ways of carrying oneself, tastes, manners of speaking, and sense of being born (or 'called') to leadership in church and society; not to mention the ingrained self-deprecation of the upper-middle class that can look remarkably like the 'humility' required of those most appropriate to church leadership. The performance of a *habitus* also shapes the way that an individual is perceived. A systematic study would be required to examine how this works in practice, but the general impression that diocesan bishops at any rate do tend to speak and carry themselves as persons shaped by a particular class position. A systematic empirical study of the value of cultural and educational capital in the church would also need to map how this works in relation to the economic background, cultural and educational capital of, say parish clergy, or in relation to those clergy and lay people elected to represent various constituencies on the Church of England's General Council, or the various church bureaucracies and the Church Commissioners.

7.8 Here I have simply sketched out a Bourdieusian hypothesis for examination, relating educational and cultural capital to one part of the church's leadership; a more comprehensive treatment would need not only to examine this empirically, but also to consider the rate of exchange of other forms of capital to religious capital, in particular, 'expertise' (in Bourdieu's terms, 'scientific capital'), how that is valued, and turned into religious capital, and the capacity to shape the church. Such expertise could be, for example, theological, sociological, medical, psychological, business/economic expertise, different forms of capital coming to the fore in different situations, and controversies. Given the multi-faceted, fractured conception of social class, such as we find in Bourdieu, that would give clear insight into the class-relations as we find them operating within the church.

Conclusion

8.1 Bourdieu's multifaceted conception of social class and his concept of social fields offers new and hitherto underexploited resources for understanding the intersection of religion and social class. Were suitable data produced for using Bourdieu's theoretical framework from *Distinction* (1984), we would be in a much better place to pinpoint the elective affinities of different class fractions for different kinds of religion (and different kinds of non-religion!). It would also enable us to triangulate with the kind of shoe-leather field research for which Bourdieu's sociology of fields is much better suited. Bourdieu's conception of fields brings us to the problem from a somewhat different angle, and is particularly appropriate for looking at how different capital from other fields convert into religious capital in the religious field. This has the potential to give us a much fuller and more nuanced account of social class relations within churches, sects and denominations, particularly given the fact

that different class fractions will possess more of particular species of capital, and less of others.

Notes

- 1 The other limitation of most surveys is that with weekly church attendance well under 10% (or 100 persons out a general population sample of 1000), one would need a very large sample, or a deliberate over-sampling of the faithful, to do much analysis on the most committed church folk.
 - 2 This is one of the reasons I am not inclined to think 'spiritual capital' (Verter 2004; Guest 2007) rather than 'religious capital' is preferable, though I have some sympathy for the reasons others have made this shift. Religion in late modernity has undoubtedly become more fluid and less institutional—and this is precisely why many people refer to themselves as 'spiritual rather than religious'. I would, however, argue that people who refer to themselves as 'spiritual but not religious' are still taking a position relative to the religious field – just as the prophet and magician do relative to the priest in Bourdieu's (1977) discussion of Weber.
 - 3 Of course the big houses have certainly declined, but that is not to say that there are not others whose good fortunes have risen, particularly in high finance, but such wealth does not come with the same set of expectations and obligations.
 - 4 See: <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukcm/1986/3> (last consulted 04 June 2016).
 - 5 Significantly, for the Church in England, see John Wycliffe's treatise (1992).
 - 6 Most analyses are somewhat out of date, and comparisons to other orders of ministry have yet to be made.
 - 7 This is also true of other senior leadership roles in the Church, such as Cathedral Deans, and to a lesser degree Suffragan Bishops or Residentiary Canons; none of these will not be discussed here. Much of the logic of capital would apply there as well, but the procedures are different, and so we won't discuss that here.
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