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Sociology into Theology
The Unacceptable Leap

Kieran Flanagan

Abstract

By means of a comparison between Bourdieu and Simmel, this article explores the fusion of theology and religion so as to give sociological expression to Kierkegaard's leap of faith. When detached from theology, religion services civil and secular needs in ways that enhance power and the right of the state to regulate the agenda of the politics of identity. In their dealings with religion, Bourdieu and Simmel present sociology with a choice of fusing the category of religion with theology or not. If the outcome is fusion, then the prospects of a religious reflexivity are enhanced, thus facilitating a leap of faith and the opening of a fruitful dialogue with theology, where sociology can develop new horizons for understandings of culture.

Key words
religion ■ sociology ■ theology

WHILE KIERKEGAARD'S notion of a leap of faith has had a profound effect on the shaping of existentialism, it has had little impact on sociology. The notion refers to the response to a 'radical breach', a disconnection between one state, sin, and another, freedom, where choice is to be exercised, one involving a leap of faith (Carlisle, 2006: 122). This impulse can emerge as a reaction to anxiety, where making a leap presents a solution to perplexity. But, with a sense of sin ebbing away, has the need for a leap of faith been fatefully undermined (Kierkegaard, 1980: 29–46)? Has secularization removed religious guilt from the ground of culture on which religion resides, so making the need for a leap groundless?

Times change and the need for a leap of faith might emerge from other considerations, perhaps more germane to sociological interests. All in

culture now seems riddled with uncertainty, a sense of fracture, of unfettered individualism and of de-contextualization. Anxious realizations have arisen that secularity itself is contingent. Bleakly, it would seem that the imperatives for a leap of faith persist as an endemic fault-line of sociology: its persistent incapacities to reconcile what Kierkegaard distinguished as 'the "outwardness" of scientific observation from the "inwardness" of spiritual experience' (Thomte, 1980: xv). Against this background, the self still stands as the arbiter on its own ultimate destiny, now one of making wagers in times when the social resources of solidarity are greatly weakened (Flanagan, 1996). Thus, increasingly, the self stands alone in the field of culture, not by existential choice but through its fate of being in a state of social isolation denoted as postmodernity, which represents the after-life of modernity, where solace no longer seems to exist.

Somehow, the ever enlarging powers of categorization that characterize the fulfilment of sociological ambitions have yielded a sense of emptiness, but also a realization that 'it is terribly important to see that that is not all there is' (Taylor, 2007: 743). The quest for something more leads Taylor to suggest that 'conversion, breaking out into the broader field, normally makes one aware of how much we are always shutting out' (2007: 769). This sensibility draws into focus a realization of sociology's adeptness in shutting out theology from its disciplinary gaze.

By dismissing theology from its disciplinary perspectives sociology is enabled to imperialize religion and to treat it as a category apart. In this article it is argued that denial of a fusion between theology and religion cripples the prospect of a leap of faith, which reflexivity increasingly renders possible as an acceptable option in a culture marked by fracture, fragmentation and isolation. This effort to deny a fusion between theology and religion occurs for good secular reasons.

Prised apart from theology, religion is a resource of cultural, symbolic and political capital well fitted for domestication in law and in civil society. Religion can be invoked as a resource for authority and the enforcement of equality in ways that secure social solidarity. The attachment of religion to theology impairs these ambitions. Likewise, in the secular university, religious studies also seeks to detach religion from theology. This detachment enhances the autonomy of religious studies as a disinterested comparative discipline. Yet, to follow Taylor, much of the ground of culture is lost to view, for, as argued below, religious studies masks a great deal. To see better, some instead invoke the use of sociology to inspect the place of religion in the cultural landscape. Reflection on these matters forms the first half of the article.

But what is sociology to see in culture? This was a question that haunted anthropology from its inception, where religion and culture were so perplexingly entangled. As Keane has well indicated, 'the category of "religion" has long stood for the general problem of apparently strange beliefs' (2008: 110). Is culture to be clothed as a surrogate theology, with its own form of religion shaped to legitimize the power of sociology? Or is

culture to be understood as shaped by a religion fused to theology, one concerned not with templates but with the prototype – God? Such questions bring a leap of faith into closer sociological focus, but in an unsettling manner. Somehow, the discipline is swivelled around in an unfamiliar theological direction. The choices generated by the prospect of a leap of faith seem alien to conventional understandings of the discipline. The second half of the article suggests that a choice over a leap of faith (of whether to fuse theology with religion or not) emerges from a comparison between Bourdieu and Simmel.

Following a French sociological tradition from Comte to Durkheim, Bourdieu articulates a need to detach theology from religion to affirm the right and the capacity of sociology to give witness to the enduring significance of the sacred. A fusion of religion with theology would deny to sociology the vision of its destiny as a replacement of Catholicism, at least in the French case. Such efforts to displace Christianity from its disciplinary tenets are by no means confined to sociology. They are the hallmark of anthropology, which also seems to have an interest in rendering Christianity invisible and in treating it with disciplinary inattention. Recognition of Christianity in anthropology impairs its ambitions to characterize local cosmologies in their singular circumstances. But as concerns with world religions such as Islam and Buddhism grow, so too does a realization emerge regarding the artificial basis of the detachment of Christianity from anthropology. Against this background, little attention has been given to how Christianity fuses its theology into religion in ways that facilitate the reproduction of belief on the field of culture (Hann, 2007: 383–4).

The case *for* a fusion of both from within a purely sociological remit comes from Simmel. He was theologically literate in ways most contemporary sociologists are not. For Simmel, religion as a category, as a form, is incomplete without reference to a theology whose content enables all manner of contradictions to be transcended. Unexpectedly, his sociological interests are directed towards the spiritual properties of culture. A comparison of Bourdieu and Simmel presents sociology with a choice: to fuse religion with theology or not. But if Simmel is chosen, then the matter of a leap of faith is contextualized in theology but set as a consideration that emerges from sociological understandings of religion. In his account, the fusion provides a focus for sociology to treat a leap of faith as acceptable and one to be made in the 'right' direction to the God revealed in Christianity.

Broad-brushed essays are like paintings with large sweeps that beg questions as to their patterns and how these are to be judged. If sociology is to make a leap of faith, into which theology is this movement to be made? Clearly, Islam, Buddhism and Judaism suggest that they too represent the 'right' direction. Apart from these claims, the matter of choice over a fusion for sociology has become complicated, for it faces a plurality of theologies set to reflect the needs of the times. Each of these theologies takes on adjectival properties, some of which are interlinked, making a matter of

sociological choice in regard to a leap of faith even more complex. Thus, feminist theology makes alliances with queer theology, and ecological theology seeks marriage with all-encompassing Incarnational forms of theology and so on. All theological stances are arbitrary. The premise of this article inclines towards a theology cast in orthodox forms of Catholicism. This affirmation might seem unusual, for Protestantism, and perhaps more distantly Judaism, seem to represent the implicit theologies closest to the roots of sociology. Some qualifications as to the expectations regarding a leap of faith need to be made.

It is not argued that reflexivity will automatically yield a leap of faith, as if analytical excellence ensures such a prospect. Any leap entails the grace to yield, to convert to another view. Second, the history of Christianity is filled with accounts of the disjunction between theology and religion. The Greeks, the Chinese and other cultures have presented forms of religion that stand oddly in relation to theological assumptions. Their assimilation and indigenization necessitated continual leaps of faith to fuse these sorts of religion into theological expectations.

This article assumes that the disjunction of theology and religion is a construction of a civil, secularizing society, one whose values sociology embodies and affirms. This lends an artificial knowing property to the disjunction and to the fusion denied. Thus, secularity, modernity and the Enlightenment have histories based on securing these disconnections, where reason is to displace revelation, and so reject any form of religion fused with theology from the public square. Where does sociology stand in these matters?

Sociology and the Fusion of Religion with Theology

The current *Catechism of the Catholic Church* offers a means of understanding how theology and religion are to be fused for the purposes of this article. Theology refers to 'the mystery of God's inner life within the Blessed Trinity', but this task of reflection is linked to concerns with the economy of salvation by means of Divine revelation (1994: 56, no. 236). An astute sociologist will spot this Weberian aspect of theology but is likely to baulk at the constraints revelation imposes on a discipline dedicated to operating under the seemingly infinite powers of reason. The imperative to fuse theology with religion becomes evident when the latter is defined in terms of the duty of offering worship to God (1994: 458, no. 2105). Thus, in forms of worship are to be found the contradictions generated by a fusion of the two.

In these rituals, the seen has to be blended into the unseen, but in ways such that properties belonging to the Incarnational are manifested and recognized. Representations in the social have to be sown into imperfect endeavours to secure re-presentations of the holy. On the slender basis of a hyphen, religion is fused with theology in practices whose characterizations arouse much sociological curiosity (Flanagan, 1991). More conventionally, and in thrall to its disciplinary conceits, sociology has sought to cast asunder what God had joined together: religion and theology.

Detached from theology, religion has been converted from a resource for the fulfilment of theological entailments into a category fitted to the needs of comparative purposes. This category, invented in the 17th century, has taken on a semi-autonomous existence since, serving ethnographic, civil, legal and classificatory purposes outside the pale of theology. Comte and Durkheim realized the opportunities the detachment of religion from theology offered to sociology. It could make its own virtual religion, one where the kernel of Catholicism was removed, and one where all that was excellent in Man could be affirmed, not for the benefit of God, but for the god of society, where collective effervescence could be more purposefully tapped. There the sacred could be affirmed in ways that manifested and secured societal needs through rituals.

Both Comte and Durkheim reverenced religion for the indispensable way it secured social solidarity. But these affirmations of religion generated a legacy of diffuseness. Increasingly, in the late 20th century, religion was given adjectives, such as implicit, invisible and civil, to qualify this property of diffuseness. Religion was of central importance in society, but in ways whose categorization is unclear. An outcome of this definitional opacity, as Viswanathan eloquently observes, is that religion has been banished to the ceremonial margins of society (1998: 250). In form, religion has become an empty shell for the exercise of civil politeness. On these peripheries, religion stands uneasily as the custodian of memory, fit for invocation when society needs to say something solemn about itself. But this marginalization expresses a sense of breakage with the past, when religion was fused to theology. In this regard, memory is dangerous, for it invokes nostalgia for past times, when leaps of faith were possible, but which now, on the present stony ground of culture, are impossible. But two changes have occurred of late in England that greatly complicate understandings of the fusion between theology and religion. These refer to changes occurring outside Christianity.

The first relates to the rise of Islam in modern Western Europe. A rival to Christianity has appeared, in which religion and theology are fused in ways that admit no compromise. In its radical versions, Islam presents a spectre that threatens both the stability of the civil order and the tenets of secularization in English society. The second change relates to the rise of holistic spirituality.

Whereas secular society detaches religion from theology, holistic spirituality sets its own conundrum. It wishes to bypass organized religion to realize a theology of self-seeking, one formulated to meet the spiritual needs of postmodernity and those of an expressive individualism. These are marked less by rite than right. But the emergence of holistic spirituality has reinstated the matter of a fusion between religion and theology. It has challenged those within organized religion to reclaim their spiritual credentials, but fused to the authority of a theology formulated by reference to revelation. This split marks current debates on the sociology of spirituality (Flanagan and Jupp, 2007). But, apart from the complexities spirituality generates regarding the fusion, if any, between religion and theology,

sociology finds itself in the bizarre position of having to arbitrate in areas for which it has no expertise. It could save face and confine its arbitrations to matters of routinization, but this would satisfy neither party: those affirming holistic spirituality and those who seek to contextualize the pursuit of spirituality within the ambit and authority of organized religion. Something more is required, for spirituality has entered the realm of self-understanding in contemporary culture, where many leaps of faith are made by individuals to search for and to affirm a sense of contact with powers greater than themselves. This questing and seeking suggests that the prospects for a fusion between religion and theology are not quite off the drawing board of culture. Is sociology fated to deny the prospects of such a fusion? One theologian decided it was.

In his influential study *Theology and Social Theory*, Milbank charged sociology with being a secular policeman of the sublime, and as a result of this exercise of the will to power, expressed in positivism and the exalted Marxism of the 1970s, deserved to be expelled from his vision of the city of God (1990 [2006]). Milbank's prognosis was that the link between sociology and theology would be decidedly unfruitful. In this study, sociology was cast as a rentier class within theology. So denoted, sociology was fit only to be deposited in a cul-de-sac and was to be deprived of any analytical means of escape from this end. Not surprisingly, the sociological response to this complex, inchoate and implosive study was decidedly frigid and the contempt it bestowed on the discipline was reciprocated (Flanagan, 1992). The Radical Orthodoxy movement that emerged from this study has produced no sociological response. Indeed, there is an inverse ratio between the theological significance awarded to Radical Orthodoxy and its sociological insignificance. If sociology is to enter the theological labyrinth it has to make its own pathways, those that meet its own particular analytical needs in combinations that are peculiar to disciplinary self-understandings.

Few who cite Weber's famous notion of the signalman, where ideas determine the tracks upon which actions are propelled by the dynamics of interest, attend to the theological ambience surrounding the employment of this metaphor. The notion is set in relation to matters of redemption and one's image of the world in which this is to be pursued and to what end (1958: 280). Employed in an essay on the social psychology of religion, the metaphor has a decidedly theological cast that now seems profoundly estranging to many in English sociology.

For many of its practitioners, the sociology of religion represents a means of escape from theology. Ultimate affiliations are to the discipline not to the claims of theology. This marks the distancing of many from religious sociology, which was common in France in the years after the Second World War. By default, in the absence of any specific analysis of theological matters, organized religion became an object of fascination in terms of its meltdown in modernity, where it was secularized and where the needs it supposedly sustained were met by replacements in sects and cults, New Age religions and, of late, holistic spirituality. Until recently, concerns with

theology and Christianity have been written out of the history of sociology (Brewer, 2007). It would be foolish to think that theologians felt spurned by sociologists refusing to address their beliefs. They too had their own reasons for distancing themselves from sociological interventions. Each discipline feared the other and conversations between both were rare, hence the significance of the symposium held by the Dominicans in Oxford in 1978 that produced a notable if perplexing exchange in a conversation that, oddly, quickly fell silent (Martin et al., 1980 [2003]). Yet, there was more of Catholicism floating around English sociology and social anthropology before the 1990s than many of their practitioners wished to recognize.

The cultural and political milieu in which English sociology has secularized itself, and the implicit Protestantism it imbues, made it reluctant to discern the Catholic trappings and concerns of French importations that have so profoundly shaped theoretical deliberations of the discipline. Althusser, Bourdieu, Foucault, Latour and Lyotard were well-read in Catholic theology in ways that gave shape to their intellectual concerns, especially in their later writings. But this interweaving of theology with sociology can be traced back to Durkheim and Weber. Durkheim manifested theological preferences, notably for Catholicism as against Protestantism. But those who argue that sensitivities to theological distinctions are not part of the sociological venture are on shaky grounds in terms of Weber, not least in *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*. This work might well be regarded as a study of the economic consequences of an elective affinity between Calvinism and capitalism, but it is also about matters of theological choice over the call of duties to this world and the need to attend to refractions of the other world. Whatever the outcomes in terms of theological choices, the matter of the goods requisite for salvation had a profound impact on the shaping of Weber's sociology and the legacy it bestowed on those who now follow his vocation.

More than might be realized in a secularized sociology, Catholicism has had a profound influence in shaping the insights of English social anthropology and its efforts to make sense of seemingly alien cultures. Some of the concepts that mark its accomplishments, such as liminality as conceived by Turner, have theological roots, which in times of a reflexive sociology need to be understood by reference to his conversion to Catholicism (Turner, 2005: 86–91). Similarly, Evans Pritchard's attitude to religion and its place in anthropology was greatly shaped by his conversion as a young man to Catholicism. In the case of Mary Douglas, her understanding of structures and categories requires reference to her deeply felt Catholicism. Another theology that has had a profound influence on sociological traditions is that of Judaism. Its diverse influences in terms of concerns with the visual, with naming, and with hope and estrangement have made their mark on Adorno, Bauman, Benjamin, Durkheim, Marx and Simmel. From its history and contemporary circumstances, sociology's own attitudes to theology and its fusion with religion are, at best, more ambiguous than might initially seem to be the case. But the need to consider the implications

of a fusion between religion and theology remains, even in a society with post-secular ambitions.

Detachments of Religion from Theology in Civil Society

A reason for detaching religion from theology relates to the inclusiveness this process facilitates. But this ambition has become sabotaged of late by some forms of religion, notably those attached to theologies that have emerged as impediments to liberal affirmations of equality in areas such as gender, sexuality and ethnicity. Thus, far from expanding the realm of the social in a Durkheimian sense, religion has emerged as a category that diminishes choices and lifestyles in ways incompatible with the values of identity politics and the civil rights the state is supposed to enshrine.

The sanctity of law has been invoked as a means of counteracting these threats of diminution. As a result, law has been drawn into unfamiliar territory to look for a consensual definition of religion, one detached from the claims of theology. But such efforts have generated a new set of contradictions, which Rivers (2007) encapsulates well when he suggests that the central value of equality to the state and society generates intolerance of dissenters, and most especially of those who might bind religion to theology in ways that nurture discrimination and judgement of differences that serve to exclude. Thus the fusion of religion with theology can generate uncivil outcomes at odds with the enshrinement of the absolute and ultimate value of the dignity of the individual. Those who fuse religion with theology in areas pertaining to the power of the state risk critical scrutiny, if not the threat of sanctions, as the Catholic Bishop of Lancaster was to find out recently.

Bishop O'Donoghue published a document on the moral and spiritual expectations for English Catholic schools that was received with warm approbation by the Vatican. The profession and practice of faith, Gospel values, sacramental life, prayer, moral life and God's plan for salvation were all clearly laid out. The resources of religion were to be put to theological ends and harnessed to building up a community of faith (O'Donoghue, 2008). This effort to re-fuse religion with theology for the purpose of edification of Catholic pupils generated deep hostility well expressed in the views of the chairman of the parliamentary cross-party committee on children, schools and families, Barry Sheerman. In reaction to the bishop's document, he stated that: 'it seems to me that faith education works as long as people are not serious about their faith'. As soon as doctrinaire attitudes emerged from fundamentalist bishops, he felt that questions had to be asked, for 'this is taxpayers' money after all' (2008). His comments suggested that religion was fine as long as nobody felt tempted to take it in a theological direction and to believe in something. For him, the secular state should have no interest in funding such ends.

What emerges from this exchange is that the state has an interest in precluding religion from being expanded in a theological direction lest uncivil judgements of difference emerge, which are at odds with the ultimate

values of a multi-faith inclusive society. The eradication of theological differences has a civil purpose of facilitating pluralism and thus generating cultural and educational circumstances that will enable cohesion and solidarity to flourish. Northern Ireland is frequently cited as an example within the United Kingdom of the uncivil effects of a fusion of religion and theology, where prejudice rather than reason rules.

In a society geared to treat religion as a nominal affair, as indicated by the 72 percent who signified affiliation to Christianity in the English and Welsh Census 2001, but only 10 percent of whom attend church weekly, the arrival of Islam with its fusion of religion and theology seems an alien intrusion, not least in the rhetoric it brings to the cultural marketplace. Apostasy, martyrdom, heaven and hell, prophecy, segregation of gender roles, strict sexual morality and an uncompromising belief in revelation present a theological face that seems pre-modern to a society whose attention is focused on shaping life after the success of secularization.

Whereas, for some, Catholicism has capitulated to the world in a form of internal secularization (Isambert, 1976), Islam admits no such compromises, for it proclaims that revelation always overrides the claims of reason and nowadays marks the passing fads of modernity with the stamp of irrelevance. This explains why Islam is so difficult to assimilate into a civic and legal order built on a mandate derived from Christianity but whose grip on society has weakened. The problem with Islam is that it has not been 'purified' by modernity so that, in many areas, it stands against contemporary English culture and its domain assumptions regarding civic rights of representation. But the categories under which Islam is to be treated for these legal purposes, in terms of religion, ethnicity and race, are difficult to prioritize, as Meer (2008) has well illustrated. For Muslims, safeguards against threats and discrimination are better protected by recourse to Race Relations Acts rather than to legal forms of protection for religious beliefs, which are weak (Meer, 2008).

The enormous public debate surrounding the peculiar effort of the Archbishop of Canterbury in February 2008 to advocate a place for Islam and Sharia law in the United Kingdom generated misgivings over the drift of debate on multiculturalism. Could Muslims invoke a form of law whose authority derives from revelation and should this have priority over civil law whose mandates stem from the application of reason to individual cases? Further problems emerge when a religion fused to a theology is invoked as a defence of the right to discriminate, a case in point being Christians who refuse to sanction adoption by same-sex couples, or to register civil partnerships. The confusions surrounding all these issues are well illustrated in the controversies over the civil rights of Islamic women to wear the *hijab* in public.

These claims turn identity politics upside down, for these women are demanding a right *not* to be recognized on the public square. Such claims in the Netherlands and England mark a clash between the entitlement to display religious symbols and the discomforts these generate for a civil

society whose orderings are increasingly based on secular values (Chambers, 2007: 128–34). Efforts to prohibit the wearing of the veil in French schools in the interests of affirming inclusiveness have managed to generate a sense of exclusion among a religious minority who are the supposed beneficiary of ideals for citizenship that include all (Scott, 2007). These efforts to keep the public space free from the display of religious symbols occur at a time when notions of *laïcité* are themselves becoming secularized (Willaime, 2004: 375–81). But if religion is to be given an autonomous legal status, how is sociology to understand the implications of its detachment from theology?

Luhmann offers some answers. In his treatise, theology is domesticated to religion and dovetailed to account for its powers in ways that are sociologically comprehensible. He treats theology in relation to religious dogmatics, and these are to be understood by reference to their social functions (Green, 1982: 25–9). These denote the capacity to convert 'the indeterminable world into a determinable one'. Thus, Green suggests that, for Luhmann, religion realizes 'this function by "sacralizing" the realm of the indeterminate through a process of "ciphering"'. Ciphers are symbols that replace the indeterminate but also hide behind it (1982: 23–4). The mysterious capacity to convert what is indefinite into the definite had been grasped earlier by Weber in his notion of office charisma. Unlike its more unstable general form, which operated on the wilder shores of theology, office charisma denoted the impersonal transmission of powers to decipher symbols but also to constitute their mysterious basis in a routinized way that was legitimate and authoritative. Because symbols are mysterious and indeterminate, their interpretation expands the possibilities of subjective responses. But the strength of the notion of office charisma is that it can objectify these necessary properties of the subjective by rendering the designations of symbols as non-negotiable and beyond personal inclination and preference. Office charisma relates to the exercise of sacramental powers to change the profane into the sacred in acts of consecration.

Bourdieu grasped the implications of these consecratory powers for understanding the constitution of the field of culture, where the right to name and designate revealed enormous powers that could be exercised in literature and aesthetics. This indicates why sociology might have an interest in detaching religion from theology and denying the prospects of their fusion. Religion is a power to be harnessed to constitute the contours of the field of culture. Its invocation validates sociological characterizations of culture while at the same time providing a means of accounting for its contours and designations.

In his famous definition, Durkheim treated religion as 'a unified system of beliefs and practices relative to sacred things' (1915: 47). The question of the truth or falsity of the religion is beside the point. It is the social functions of religion and the collective effervescence it serves to tap that legitimize sociological interest in the topic. In his account religion and society are one. But Durkheim does not seem to realize that the capacities to mark

activities as sacred can be appropriated to sectional ends. Far from being a neutral resource, religion detached from theology becomes a court of appeal for those wishing to legitimize their powers of designation and their right to treat entities and domains as sacred. The opacity of religion and the elusiveness of its definitions amplifies this power, but in ways such that redress is weakened and disabled.

Thus the BBC, seeking to preclude giving privilege to one faith, Christianity, changed the name of its religious affairs department to a more neutral appellation: religion and ethics. This re-branding signified a non-sectarian, inclusive stance in regard to religion, one well fitted to the political values of a multi-faith society and one that reflected the spirit of a New Left ideology that sought to muzzle theological notions of difference in matters of religious belief. By disengaging religion from the confessional claims of theology, it can be claimed that some transcendent position for commentary can be found that seems self-evidently disinterested. But behind the opacity surrounding the category of religion lie all sorts of unacknowledged value orientations and interests rendered unaccountable by this mask of disinterest in religious enquiry. As religion becomes detached from theological accountability, the issue of its alternative contextualization needs to be considered. This rarely occurs, for the detachment of religion from theology plays on the indifference to religious matters which secularity endorses, thus diminishing further the prospects for critical redress. At some point, the implications of this detachment need to be confronted, for failure to secure a definition for the category of religion can become counter-productive. A secure and agreed definition is necessary in law if the law is to arbitrate on matters of discrimination and human rights that are affected by matters of religion. Some definition has to found for sound judgement to be secured.

Reviewing the complexity of legal definitions of religion under categories of belief, identity and way of life, Gunn (2003) concluded that efforts to find an agreed version were futile. Because religion deals with matters of belief, these can slide into theological spheres where the law can exercise no distinctions, or rather it should not.

Gunn headed his article with a reference to the English Charity Commissioners who asserted that 'belief in a supreme being remains a necessary characteristic of religion for the purposes of English charity law' (cited in 2003: 189). To escape the confinements of the God of Christianity, the Commissioners settled for the god invented by reason on the grounds that it was sufficiently opaque to admit consideration of the beliefs of all but without doctrinal restriction. This disinterest in securing an exact definition of religion facilitated an administrative interest in inspecting all charitable activities that could be deemed religious in origin or intent. The criteria used for these activities were formulated on the basis of their contribution to the public weal. But the assumption was made that charity related to the good of this world and not the next. In this way religion was separated from theology by the state and so enclosed religious orders, who prayed

for the dead in the next world, found that their activities were no longer to be deemed charitable. What related to the next world and to theology was defined, for tax purposes, as not charitable, was not recognized and therefore in civil society was non-existent. Detaching religion from theology had another benefit for the state, one that seemed to affirm a Durkheimian point. If one did not have a religion, then it was necessary to invent one.

Napoleon understood this necessity well when he cried 'Religions! Religions! Oh children of men! Every time I assumed power I immediately made an effort to re-establish religion' (cited in Desroche, 1973: 39). Robespierre had grasped this point earlier. For him, the de-Christianization of France posed acute dangers for the revolution and its republican hopes, which is why he promulgated the first Festival of the Supreme Being. Held on 8 June 1794, the festival attracted vast numbers in Paris, who flocked to see what the state had rendered sacred and worthy of worship. In a grand and spectacular ritual, the image of atheism was destroyed to reveal the nativity of a new god of wisdom (Scurr, 2006: 295–8). By detaching religion from theology, the state could fill its pantheons with new divine images that could be mobilized to legitimate a new order based not on the Divine right of Kings but on the power of the people.

Religion might be treated as a form of false consciousness. Yet its allure, its power to designate and to consecrate, to affirm and to legitimize, to commemorate, to bind and to heal, to sacralize the profane and to profane the sacred as required for the exigencies of rule provide religion with enormous attractions to the state. The rhetoric of religion, its powers of sacerdotal designation and the charismatic aura it can invoke are forms of spiritual, symbolic and cultural capital which the state is only too tempted to pillage. But if the state so appropriates religion to its own ends, to enhance the credibility of its right to rule, a question emerges over the ultimate origins of its own rights to sacralize itself. Who deifies these deities constituted by the state and renders them subject to critical redress? In his debate with Habermas, Ratzinger (now Pope Benedict XVI) descended on this point, when he argued that appeal to faith can purify what he terms the *pathologies of reason* (Habermas and Ratzinger, 2006: 77–8). Such a response might seem ludicrous to Richard Dawkins, for whom all appeals to theology are corrupting. But the question remains: how are the powers of religion to be checked when it is detached from theology and can be harnessed to nefarious purposes? Invocations of religion can legitimize tyrannical ends when the state takes to itself ultimate powers of a deity and where it establishes itself as the ultimate court of appeal (Burleigh, 2006).

In a curious way the detachment of religion from theology permits an ideology to flourish in ways that misconstrue what lies in culture. This masking emerges in critiques of religious studies. These suggest that the separation of religion from theology leads to a blindness in regard to deciphering layers of culture. Efforts to resolve this problem revert the matter of religion and culture to sociology to resolve, but in ways in which the issue of a fusion with theology returns, but from an unexpected route.

Religious Studies and the Illusion of Religion

The category of religion emerged after the Reformation as a response to concerns with piety and obligation. Because the term was subservient to theology, its significance was limited. Fused to theology, religion related to public and private forms of worship and spiritual practice. With the onset of the Enlightenment matters changed, for religion took on intrinsic properties of value that required its detachment from theology for these to be better understood. Oddly, therefore, the rise of interest in religion as an end in itself was coterminous with the onset of modernity, for it generated the conceit that religious activity could be categorized and domesticated to the expectations of reason. The need to classify and define religion in terms of some essence was fuelled by the comparative needs of anthropology and ethnography in the late 19th and early 20th century (McKinnon, 2002: 68–70).

It soon became apparent that religion was not just any form of magic or set of procedures for dealings with the supernatural. Religion had distinctive properties bearing on the social that needed to be encapsulated in some definition. *Religio* relates to the notion of *ligare*: to bring together, to realize socially recognized obligations. These are fulfilled in observances that can be deemed as socially beneficial (Saler, 1987: 395–6). The benefits of detaching religion from theology had become apparent to many – to the state, to sociology, but also to religious studies.

A recent academic invention, whose star in the United Kingdom is now on the wane, religious studies is a multi-disciplinary colony for the theologically dispossessed. As a sub-discipline, religious studies has never quite escaped the shadow of theology and, indeed, the charge of being parasitic on it (Flanagan, 1990: 88–90; Quartermaine, 2007). McKinnon correctly argues that functionalism enabled religion to be contained within sociology, but without theological reference. When this theoretical perspective of functionalism faded in the 1960s, substantive concerns started to emerge. These changes in expectations marked movements from explanation to understanding and, in this way, accentuated phenomenological facets of religion, its subjective and spiritual properties and the essence it embodied (McKinnon, 2002: 62–4). Unexpectedly, these propelled the study of religion back in a theological direction. Furthermore, recognition of the contextualization of belief rehabilitated the prospects for looking again at a fusion between religion and theology. The prospect took on a different image and set of expectations.

Rather than treat religious practice as the activities of the Other, the need for a dialogue between the anthropologist and those on the field of inquiry became increasingly necessary (Spickard, 2002: 156–8). This reflected an outcome of the debate on rationality in anthropology in the 1970s, where problems of translation between contexts of inquiry generated hermeneutic considerations. Against this background, as Spickard suggests, inquiry became more hesitant, trading not imposing became desirable and in the dialogue geared to understandings of openings of meanings, a change

of mind seemed possible (2002: 161–2). These changes brought in train a realization that sociology's ambitions for generalization produce 'a class of worldviews that implicitly belittles religious understandings' (2002: 164). A delicate issue emerged: who owned the definition of religion? Did religion belong to those who studied it or to its consumers? Who is the beneficiary of definitions of religion? As suggested above, the state and civil society have vested interests in these matters, but these come more to the fore in the case of a discipline, religious studies, whose legitimacy is based on the study of religion.

Fitzgerald (2000) suggests that religious studies derives mandates from ecumenical liberal theology. It endorses the claims of religious studies to study religion in an inclusive and comparative manner operating in semi-detachment from theology. The justification given is that religion, released from the confessional constraints of theology, can be studied in an objective and comparative way so that a common essence characterizing all belief systems can be found. But, for Fitzgerald, the mobilizing notion of religion used in religious studies is illusory. There is no consensual definition available that is sufficient to bind all practitioners together in some agreed identity that would denote a commonality of academic purpose. He argues that the power of religious studies, based on an appeal to this illusory consensus, has been harnessed to disable rivals in other disciplines. As a consequence, the accomplishments of those in anthropology and sociology who also study religion are unrecognized. They exist in dispersed form when set against the monopolistic claims of religious studies to study religion in all forms, especially those pertaining to culture and ritual (Fitzgerald, 2000: 221). Thus, for Fitzgerald, 'the whole subject of religion is based on a chimera' (2000: 49). This leads to a peculiar paradox which Fitzgerald expresses well:

> the more the researcher distances himself or herself from the explicit or implicit theological domination of 'religion', adopting for example sociological or anthropological critical perspectives, the more irrelevant the concept of religion will become, except as an ideological construct of western and western-dominated societies from which the scholar has progressively freed him or herself . . . (2000: 8)

His major concern is that the study of non-Western religions, such as in India and Japan, is distorted by the definitional opacity of the term 'religion', which cannot read the distinctions and categories it is supposed to uncover and to critically interrogate. But there is a more fundamental point to his study. In his reading, religion is coterminous with culture and society, but this link is to be understood by reference to ritual and symbols whose distinctions and meanings other disciplines (rivals to religious studies), notably anthropology, cultural studies and sociology, are best fitted to illuminate. For his argument and its resolution, Fitzgerald does realize that a term resistant to definition, 'religion', is to be attached to another term

equally afflicted with opacity, 'culture'. In this new set of expectations, sociology is called on to decipher forms of religion blended with culture. But what if the context is Catholic and the assumption is made that the rituals to be deciphered make no sense if a fusion between religion and theology is denied? Contextualization and subjective preferences re-fuse religion to theology and these emerge for sociological consideration in ritual practices particular to a field of culture where strange beliefs are routinely enacted.

Fitzgerald returns to a delicate matter of whether the study of religion can escape its theological debts. He observes that often the 'ritual pieties' of the academy disguise tacit 'appeal to a theological doctrine with Christian assumptions' (2003: 251–3). In their ideological usages, their theological borrowings are well disguised, naturalized and subverted to legitimize the secular values of the academy and the disinterested study of religion it seeks to proclaim.

The arrangements of subjects on the academic field are not accidental, as Bourdieu's *Homo Academicus* (1988) has well indicated. Some subjects are awarded a peripheral status on the field if their knowledge claims are deemed to undermine the values of the academy. If the status of academic subjects in the secular university reflects disinterested appeals to reason, then disciplines such as theology, that are confessional in bias and deferential to revelation, can be placed on the margins of academic culture, where their contaminating effects on the worth of other disciplines can be minimized. Given that theology relates to the foundation of the idea of a university, its structure, nomenclatures and architectural manifestations, often in Gothic styles, the secular university dislikes being reminded of these theological borrowings. By appeal to reason and civic entitlement, the university takes to itself rights to consecrate certain forms of knowledge, to recognize some as of academic worth and others not. In this setting, sociology might wish to fill the vacuum left by a peripheralized theology.

Fitzgerald would seem to endorse this ambition, for he looks to sociology to arbitrate on religion fused not to theology but to culture. As a discipline, sociology seems well fitted to scrutinize distinctions in practice that emerge from rituals. Not surprisingly, as McKinnon (2006) realizes, Fitzgerald has opened out issues well fitted to Bourdieu's characterizations of practice and reproduction on the field of culture that specifically elicit sociological interventions. The notion that these might lead to some form of religious reflexivity that would affirm a fusion between religion and theology is likely to encounter a frigid response from Bourdieu. In his aspirations for a reflexive sociology, a leap of faith encounters a grand refusal.

Bourdieu's Detachment of Religion from Theology

At the end of the pretentiously entitled and portentously envisioned *Pascalian Meditations* (Bourdieu, 2000), the state is denoted as the ultimate court of appeal. It is the task of sociology to illuminate this conferral for it 'leads to a kind of theology of the last instance'. As the state brings naming

into existence, like a divinity, then perhaps Durkheim was 'not so naïve as is claimed when he said that "society is God"' (Bourdieu, 2000: 245). Bourdieu is not the first to use theological metaphors to characterize the power of the state. Marx used them to denote the mysterious powers of certification secured by competitive examinations for entry to the civil service. These examinations served as rites of baptism, rendering entrants worthy of service to the hidden theologies of the state.

The notion of sociology as 'a kind of theology' needs to be related to the leap of faith implied by Bourdieu in his reference to Pascal and his wager regarding God. The sacralizing power Bourdieu bestows on sociology displaces Catholicism, but not the cultural and symbolic capital embodied in Catholic theology. Notable in Bourdieu is that his ultimate reference point is theology not religion. As others have grasped, Bourdieu was uniquely proximate to Catholicism, whose language is woven into his sociological rhetoric to an inescapable degree (Flanagan, 2007: 25–9). His grand vision of sociology was secured by means of a defenestration of Catholic theology. Bourdieu provided Catholicism with the back-handed compliment of conceiving much of his sociology in terms of metaphors derived from its theology. It supplies Bourdieu with his crucial concepts: habitus and the exercise of sacramental powers, notably those of naming and consecrating. In that regard, he follows a long sociological lineage of appropriation of the language of Catholic theology in a tradition stretching back through Durkheim to Comte (Swartz, 1997: 254).

His use of sacramental theology specifically relates to the power to consecrate and it is this priestly capacity to effect a transubstantiation that supplies Bourdieu with a metaphor for understanding capacities to institute and to constitute worth on literary and artistic fields. A cultural and symbolic capital is employed in re-categorizations that seem mysteriously above critical redress. Such is the aura and sacredness surrounding the exercise of these powers that a symbolic violence occurs where those denied such gifts collude in effecting their own marginalization. The task of sociology is to de-mystify these powers so that arrangements of the cultural field are made explicit and available to critical redress.

Bourdieu's use of habitus serves to reconcile action and structure through dispositions that realize capacities to mobilize cultural and symbolic capital in a naturalized form of play that seeks to maximize the individual's position on the field. The term derives from Aristotle and Aquinas, but for Bourdieu the inspiration for its sociological application came from the art historian Panofsky. In his formulation, habitus refers to a capacity to find a mean (almost an elective affinity) between the intellectual edifice of Scholasticism and the soaring architecture of the Gothic cathedral. To that degree, in its initial formulation, habitus points to properties characteristic of a leap of faith, so that jumping from one to the other realizes an affirmation of the existence of God.

Bourdieu derives much of his understanding of power and structure in culture from Weber, specifically his concept of office charisma, mentioned

above (Bourdieu, 1987b). Thus, in reference to the critical significance of symbolic power embodied in this concept, Dianteill observes that 'a main part of the architecture of Bourdieu's sociology has been constructed around the study of religion' (2003: 543). But if this is so, what happens when his reflexive sociology is applied to the religious field?

Problems of application that relate to the matter of leaps of faith emerge over the term *'illusio'*. It refers to investments in the field and the allegiances these generate. In that regard, belief is what ties the individual to the field, for without faith there would be no investment. But the term is profoundly ambiguous when applied to the field of religion. The term affirms the need to invest if the religious game is to be enacted, but at the same time treats it as an illusion, an ideological mask for sociology to unmask. But linking *illusio* with another of Bourdieu's terms, *'hexis'*, generates a profound dilemma in regard to the reflexivity required to understand play on this field of religion. *Hexis* refers to a property of the body and the manner of its use.

Bourdieu's reflexive sociology involves a radical version of *verstehen*, a strategy for understanding that suggests an inward occupation of the embodiment of the actor by the discerning sociologist, yet at the same time – if he or she is to fulfil the distinctive analytical expectations of this approach – some distancing is required to see a picture of the field that is unavailable to its players. What Bourdieu seeks is a 'participating objectivization' that discloses the social determinants of the field. Most crucially, the inside of the field, where sensibilities of belief emerge that relate to what is subjective, is deemed to be partial in terms of what is revealed to sociology (Bourdieu, 1987a: 159). Thus Bourdieu affirms distanciation as a strategy for reflexivity, but treats what is enacted on the religious field as being *too* partial, as having no inside for sociology to appropriate. But, in hermeneutical terms, this imposes an enormous distortion. Distancing presupposes a return to appropriation and that dialogue is ruptured by Bourdieu. There is no prospect of a hermeneutical circle in this account, one where a qualitative leap *might* emerge from the dialogue. His expectations for reflexivity on the religious field deny *hexis* its potency. Disciplinary scruples render it a shell devoid of the religious embodiment that forms the basis of its use as a disciplinary device. A leap of faith is neither possible nor desirable, for Bourdieu has other ambitions for the study of the field of religion.

For him, the truth of the field lies solely at the level of the social. Beneath this level are the hidden interests that control the field of religion and preserve its beliefs in a strangeness that alienates all but true believers. These recessed aspects of the field might contain inaccessible theological matters, but these are beside the point for Bourdieu. His concerns are with what can be revealed through the exercise of the distancing and objective discernments of the well-trained reflexive sociologist. His or her gaze serves to decipher the mysteries of the field of religion, not in terms fused to theology but by reference to the beneficiaries of the mystifications

enacted there. In this regard, the gaze is to demolish mysteries and not to affirm them. Mysteries in the field of religion have only one end: the subordination of the credulous.

In relation to the field of religion, Bourdieu is concerned with relationships between 'the *secrecy* of *sacred knowledge* and secular ignorance' and the clerical interests that are the beneficiary of this discrepancy (Bourdieu, 1991: 9). The metaphors Bourdieu draws from Catholicism are turned back against theology to reveal a religion shaped by the ideological, whose powers are enhanced through the naturalization of designation of what is to be treated as sacred. Thus, consecration is not an act to be understood as mysteriously fusing what is of religion to what is of theology. Rather, it is about a power of translation of the determinate into the indeterminate, exercised for the purposes of misrecognition, set only to enhance clerical hegemony and to legitimize its basis. For Bourdieu, this exercise of power is all the more pernicious for being secured through the symbolic manipulations of aspiration. In this context, symbolic capital is set for use to one end: domination (1991: 14).

Matters of sensibility, of being acted on by reference to the mysteries of religion and theology embodied in the sacred, or in images of the aesthetic, are reduced to the social functions of power and its exercise can only be understood by reference to the rites of designation of those who control the field. For Bourdieu, the fusion of religion and theology would serve only one purpose: symbolic violence. It would involve a capitulation to mystifications that perpetuate the marginalization of believers on the field of culture. To that degree, a leap of faith would be a misuse of reflexivity, which enjoins the development of critical faculties to secure the emancipation of believers from what Bourdieu conceives as the illusory follies of theology. Thus, if reflexivity involves a bending back into the self, it is nurturing a sense of critical distance sufficient to see the futility of fusing theology with religion where a leap of faith might be considered.

Positions, practices and dispositions lie at the heart of Bourdieu's sociology, one that seeks to find ways of understanding how the actor stands in relation to a field and the interests that control its regulation (Costa, 2006). Habitus entails dispositions to navigate the field and the availability of cultural capital (qualifications). Symbolic capital relates to a capacity to decipher, to discern a hidden position and, so placed, to play up and play the game to maximum advantage. Habitus refers to a practical sense, an implicit social knowing of the designations of the field. To that degree, the term signifies a social consciousness, a sense of awareness of place. In a breadth of definition that seems to reflect its original use by Panofsky, Bourdieu asserts:

> Habitus is the basis of the social structuration of temporal existence, of all the anticipations and the presuppositions through which we practically construct the sense of the world – its signification, but also, inseparably, its orientation towards the still-to-come. (1996: 329)

But habitus has a visual dimension which Bourdieu exploits in his approach to art. His critical interests focus on the power of art critics to designate the aesthetic qualities of paintings and to secure for their judgements a property of consecration. Not surprisingly, some art historians have responded by querying the superiority of Bourdieu's own right to classify the classifiers. This query relates to a difficulty with his sociology, that it assumes an Archimedean point of disinterested objective power, fit by reason of its distance to disclose the mystifications of others. It is as if he is exempt from the application of a similar charge in relation to his own position on the field. Thus these art historians suggest that 'Bourdieu configures the field of cultural production as "objectifiable" in order to confirm his own objectivity' (Hooker et al., 2000: 218). In servicing this end, they suggest: 'Bourdieu turns on Panofsky because he detects in his humanistic account of art a kind of residual religiosity, which it is his goal to remove from the understanding of art' (2000: 223). Defenestrating religion of any theological properties clears the field for Bourdieu to reveal the matters that ultimately count: the masked basis of interest, power and authority. Sociology is well fitted to handle these entities; it is unfitted to handle subjective properties of religion, its mysteries that are more than the mystifications of the calculating. But how does Bourdieu clamber up the ladder to the sociological heights to reveal so much? This leads to a curious sociology of sport of turning Bourdieu back on Bourdieu. In his sociology, reflexivity is treated as a leap of scientific faith, where the gaze is purified in forms of self-knowing. But how does Bourdieu realize this power of distance where all is disclosed?

This relates to a point of Riley (2004) that habitus can be turned back on intellectuals to ask how crises shape their own theoretical inclinations and how they come to select some concepts as cornerstones for their works. Bourdieu (2008) seemed to understand this point in his autobiography, which he characterized as a form of 'self socio-analysis'. Verter carries this property of reflexivity further by turning Bourdieu back against Bourdieu (as he turned Weber against Weber), expanding his idea of different sorts of capital to offer a fourth concept: spiritual capital, one that extends from religious, cultural and symbolic forms. The term entails recognition of the fusion of religion and theology. Uniquely, it offers to theology a non-reductionist sociological understanding of how belief might be reproduced in its own field of religion.

Like Fitzpatrick, Verter indicates that Bourdieu reduced religion to a matter of culture. This reflects an earlier insight of Swartz (1996) that the link between religion and culture was more fruitful than might be realized initially in Bourdieu's work. Verter argues that 'spiritual dispositions may be regarded as a form of cultural capital' (2003: 152). This relates to an important fact for Weber: 'that men are *differentially qualified* in a religious way stands at the beginning of the history of religion' (1958: 287). Because the spiritual can be aestheticized, it can become a resource not *of* belief, but *for* belief, thus returning habitus to its original uses and meanings. A

knowing is required on how to use spiritual capital, something Verter notes can be realized as much by the laity as by professionals (2003: 164). To that degree, the concept is not about domination but collaboration in the use of resources to realize the goods for salvation. But Verter returns matters back to the prospect of a qualitative leap when he observes that 'religious choice may be regarded as a position-taking (*prise de position*) within a field of struggle' (2003: 165).

The grand refusal Bourdieu gives to the qualitative leap of faith reflects a paralysis, a denial of possibilities for conversion, and here one encounters an interesting point of Verter. The strength of Bourdieu's analysis lies in its emphasis on the contextualization of the field and the rules of practice deployed on it that secure its autonomy. But that strength generates a weakness: that little consideration is given to movements *across* fields, for instance from those of art to those of religion. As Verter suggests, these fields can overlap (2003: 162–3) and, if habitus denotes a struggle, it is not impossible to suggest that, in the setting of the field of religion, the wrestling focuses on making a qualitative leap of faith to secure some fusion with theological concerns. The boundaries between symbolic and spiritual capital are difficult to separate in terms of the treatment of an icon. Bourdieu would regard these boundaries as fixed, where no movement is possible and where a fusion between religious art and the theological truth it proclaims is to be arbitrarily denied. It is to Simmel one turns to find sociological permission for such a fusion, one perhaps involving a conversion, a leap of faith.

Simmel: On Attaching Religion to Theology

The fragmentary properties associated with Simmel as a sort of prophet of postmodernity are manifested in his concern with religion. His contributions were written in essay form over a period of 20 years. Their scattered production meant that the scale of his interest in religion never came into deserved critical focus, as was the case with Weber and Durkheim. The fractured nature of Simmel's sociology meant that few looked at its bits to piece together a religious mosaic, one that reveals the essence of his approach to culture and the tragedy of its modern basis. The plight of exiles from organized religion, who felt spirituality but without the impulse or the capacity to affiliate to ecclesial forms of belonging, lay at the heart of Simmel's characterizations of modernity, which seem to have taken on prophetic qualities that signify the angsts of life in present times.

Simmel's sociological interests dealt with the relationships between the subjective and the objective, between content and form, and these were expressed importantly in regard to the tension between spirituality and religion (Varga, 2007). Concerned with the living properties of religion, Simmel's stress was on *religio*, on piety. This is realized in forms of religiosity, the piety that marks off mere religion from the living and colourful properties of theology.

In this concept of religiosity, one finds a crucial endorsement of the acceptability of a qualitative leap and the means offered is through an

activity that is distinctly theological: prayer. In his expanded essay on religion (1912), Simmel suggests that:

> The person of absolutely pure faith does not care whether these ideas are theoretically possible or impossible; he simply feels inwardly that his yearning has found an outlet and a sense of fulfilment in his faith. (1997: 142)

In this regard, dogmas are felt to be true for a unity of the religious world is found that fuses religion with theology in a yearning that comes close to requiring a leap of faith, for the claims of the subjective rise over all those things that fracture and disable unity with something beyond (Simmel, 1997 [1912]: 142–3). Prayer is designated as the means of realizing this act, for the propulsion of religion into the realm of theology is not due to agency, nor statistics, nor science, but petition and reflection on circumstances of faith seeking understanding.

This matter of faith becomes of central importance later in Simmel's essay, where theology and sociology are mutually implicated in matters of trust. Thus Simmel suggests that: 'the most effective channelling of spiritual energies by religious faith also can occur in one person's belief in another' (1997 [1912]: 167). The sociological implications of the comment are obvious when he asserts later that: 'our capacity to have faith in a person or group of people . . . is one of the most stable bonds binding society together' (1997 [1912]: 170). But, to make this point, he asserts that: 'God is the absolute object of faith' (1997 [1912]: 171). It is the capacity of faith to inspire trust that leads Simmel to fuse religion with theology.

The approach taken could not be more different from that of Durkheim. Religion in this qualitative leap has a transcending property that heals fragmentation and contradiction. The role of the priest is highly important to that end. Using priesthood as a sociological notion (and he does this very much in this setting), Simmel treats the priesthood in terms of its role of operating in a spiritualized manner (1997 [1912]: 192–3) that could not be more distant from Bourdieu's reductive approach. In the former, the priest is self-giving; in the latter, he is self-serving.

In an early essay entitled 'Religion and the Contradictions of Life' (1997 [1903]), Simmel makes imaginative use of Nicholas of Cusa, the 15th-century theologian who anticipated many of the dilemmas of modernity and postmodernity in his writings. He is particularly insightful on the responses to be made to antinomies, to their resolution and their transcendence in forms of apophatic theology. For Simmel, reference to higher reconciliations of conflict must never be allowed to become rigid, for each new formation evolves:

> . . . until it finally attains that spiritual dimension whose essence is the reconciliation of all opposites. It is at this point that the rhythm of modern life will have triumphed over the very last resistance. (1997 [1903]: 44)

What Simmel supplied, and what sociology has neglected to consider ever since, is the degree to which understandings of religion are doomed to fragmentation and incompleteness. As acts, those of religion are artificial and, without reference to their theological moorings, seem folly to the wise. Only when these acts of religion are fused with theology do they take on a motive force that propels them in the living, colourful direction that Simmel envisaged, where by grace they become vivid frames, crucibles fit for Divine response. That is why religion detached from theology is meaningless; only a fusion of both enables one to make sense of the other. Only in mutual implication with theology can sociology understand the enactments occurring on the field of religion. Only by reference to a religious reflexivity can sociology enter its domain and to fully do so requires a leap of faith, a choice some will spurn and others will make. In the end, as Weber indicated, each is ultimately responsible to a calling that is inward, and no sociologist is exempt from this ruling.

Conclusion

Why should a leap of faith that involves a fusion of religion and theology be treated as a form of treachery among many sociologists? The most obvious reason is that the truth claims of sociology seem to be compromised (Dohen, 1977). But a further reason might be that sociology has its own gods, those of the religion of humanity, often subject to archaeological investigation by Durkheimian scholars. Like those who fuse religion with theology, they too make their pilgrimages to the birthplace of the founder of their religion of sociology, to visit the site of Durkheim's house and the ruins of the synagogue his father presided over. Like other pilgrims, they too make a leap of faith that this journeying ultimately matters. Have the quandaries generated by reflexivity made more acceptable a leap of faith, one reliant on a fusion of theology and religion? Three reasons are suggested that might affirm this possibility.

The first relates to the precedent set by feminism that the researcher forms part of the ethnographic narrative and is implicated in the construction of the analytical account. This realization has formed a charter for the expansion of qualitative sociology. Second, recognition of the significance of reflexivity has generated a moral entailment, indeed, a duty to represent authentically the sentiments and aspirations of the subjects of inquiry and to articulate these on their behalf. But if the topic is religion and if the field is regulated in theological terms, as for instance in Catholicism, then reflexive considerations take on a property of testimony, not as a metaphor but as a statement of affirmation of what it is to believe. The researcher admits being implicated in the field of religion and, second, gives testimony to how this is fused with theology.

Third, increasingly, fieldwork entails recognition of biographical factors. Perhaps one of the most interesting movements in recent sociology is the emergence of detailed biographies of Weber, Durkheim and of course the autobiographical reflections of Bourdieu himself. When these are

translated into English, how might the expectations of sociology be changed? This fashion for reflection on sociological lives relates to a peculiar and recently recognized property of fieldwork that bears on biography: the conversion factor.

Good fieldwork entails a conversion of view, a realization of seeing the subjects of analytical concern in a new light. When that fieldwork is of a tribe marked with religiosity, then the conversion element of reflexivity risks being amplified in a theological direction so as to see with their eyes what outsiders cannot: the need to recognize the possibility of a leap of faith, something the sociologist might wish to mark in the wider discipline as acceptable.

If there is a movement abroad in contemporary culture, it is one that deals not with the construction of disbelief, but belief. Rare are those who stand against disbelief. They form hidden and forgotten tribes of culture. Few in mainstream sociology acknowledge the existence of those who make a leap of faith – such as converts or the significant and newsworthy numbers of young men and women in Italy who suddenly flock to contemplative religious orders – denying the world and in so doing affirming it. These tribes should not exist; they do; and that is why pushing sociology into theology permits it to ask questions of those for whom a leap of faith is acceptable for the sense of the ultimate it can realize, when everything else in culture seems senseless.

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