

CHAPTER 36

THE REPRODUCTION AND TRANSMISSION OF RELIGION

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THE SOCIOLOGICAL LEGACY

The processes associated with the reproduction and transmission of religion have been at the heart of sociology since its very beginnings. The evolutionist thought that arose in the nineteenth century fashioned narratives of human history that were linear and progressive, assumed to be common to all cultures. Religion was conceived of as an anthropological universal, a mode of thinking and engaging with the world characteristic of a particular stage in cultural development. The implication was, of course, that religion was a thing of the past and represented, at worst, a retarded state out of which humans—at least in the advanced West—had successfully evolved. These assumptions are embedded in Edward B. Tylor's (1871) theory of animism, as well as in James Frazer's famous magnum opus, *The Golden Bough* (1922), which portrayed all civilizations as progressing through developmental stages dominated by magic, religion, and science, each stage superseding the one preceding it. This is echoed in Auguste Comte's slightly earlier argument that all human thought has evolved through three stages: the theological, the metaphysical, and the positive, the latter breaking with earlier quests for origins

and essences, and instead seeking laws which explain the correlation between different facts, established on the basis of observation and experiment (Swingewood 2000: 14–19). While this narrative of progress portrays traditional religion as outmoded and primitive, Comte nevertheless recognized the value of religion as a basis for social order. He combined his two key convictions in elevating sociology to the peak of scientific endeavour *and* as a new religion in itself, fulfilling the inbuilt human need to worship or revere something, as well as the collective need for order and social cohesion. In Comte's modernity, humanity is the new God, the focus of a rational, scientific religion for an enlightened people.

Within such models, an understanding of the reproduction and transmission of religion is shaped not so much by careful analysis of cultural forces *in situ*, but by an ideology of human progress. Narratives of human development that exalted Western models of rationality and science were projected on to distant cultures that were often well outside the experience, let alone the research, of their principal advocates. In these early ventures into the sociology of religion, religion was under-theorized and oversimplified, presented as a singular phenomenon with clear-cut boundaries and a preordained place in the history of human development. Its reproduction over time was discussed within the context of ritual, tradition, and institutional change, but the particular significance of these factors was subordinated to the assumptions of an evolutionary paradigm.

Émile Durkheim tackled issues of religious development with far greater subtlety than Tylor, Frazer, and Comte, but nevertheless argued that the ideas and values associated with traditional religion would, in a modern context, be overtaken by more rational, evidence-based, sociologically informed kinds of thinking. Indeed, Durkheim's vision for French education was instrumental in nurturing the laicization that became central to that nation's public identity, not least through his influence over school curricula and the consequent socialization of French school pupils into a secular world view (Lukes 1977). Durkheim's legacy is also important as it marks a shift in the conceptual contours of the sociology of religion, perpetuating evolutionary notions of modernity and progress, while introducing fresh insights into theory and method that shaped subsequent developments in the discipline, not least secularization theory. Indeed, the structural differentiation addressed in Durkheim's *The Division of Labour in Society* (1960) remains axiomatic within contemporary debates about the social significance of religion, demonstrating how the place of religious institutions within the fabric of society, the extent of their integration into wider structures, and their perceived function are all instrumental in determining their power to shape social norms and values. While some sociologists highlighted complicit ideological agendas associated with Marxism and humanism (Martin 1965), the secularization debate nevertheless dominated the sociology of religion throughout much of the twentieth century, thereby helping to perpetuate the linear, progress-oriented understanding

of modernity embodied in the work of Comte and his contemporaries. In recent decades, the relative vitality of conservative, anti-modern religious movements—radical Islam and conservative Evangelicalism, for example—has highlighted the limitations of this Paradigm, characteristic of the liberal intellectuals who often dictate the sociological agenda, and has prompted calls for a more complex, dialectical understanding of religious development (Tamney 2002: 258–60).

Such dialectical subtlety is prefigured in the work of Peter Berger (1967; 1969), whose appropriation of insights from phenomenology, particularly the human quest for order and meaning, has engendered a discipline-wide interest in plausibility structures, those shifting social forces that render religious belief more or less meaningful among particular groups within particular cultural contexts. His work demands that we ask precisely how given social conditions relate to the plausibility of religious ideas, and how culturally embedded notions of truth, authority, and meaning affect the power of religious groups to recruit and successfully socialize new members into their existing world view. These questions have preoccupied James Davison Hunter, who has adopted a Bergerian approach to ascertain how effective Evangelical Christians are at reproducing their own value systems within a contemporary Western context. Hunter examines the changing attitudes of North American seminarians and argues that the forces of modernization—characterized by functional rationality, cultural pluralism, and structural pluralism—have penetrated the boundaries of Evangelical religion and initiated a liberalization of its values (Hunter 1983). A weakening of the boundaries of the Evangelical subculture has allowed the importation of notions of tolerance and the elevation of subjective experience popular in late modern American society. Hunter traces a shift away from an understanding of the Bible and Evangelical tradition as external, non-negotiable authorities. Instead, Evangelicals are becoming more tolerant of non-Christians, less rigid in their readings of the scriptures, and more open to possibilities of change within the Evangelical world view (Hunter 1987).

Similar theoretical concerns preoccupy Nancy Ammerman in her book *Bible Believers* (1987), which explores how Southern Baptist Christians in the United States maintain their 'deviant' belief system by defending it against influences from the wider culture. Both studies focus on how the maintenance of effective plausibility structures influences the capacity of religious groups to sustain themselves; how, within a secularizing context, they manage to transmit their values successfully to the next generation. Strategies vary, from attempts to control the socialization of future evangelical leaders, which is a chief focus of Hunter's work, to the development of shared understandings of cosmic order and meaning. For example, Ammerman's study includes a discussion of theodicy, which highlights how fundamentalist Christians make sense of their encounters with misfortune by appealing to a dualistic cosmology, in which Satan has a legitimate place as a

persecutor of the righteous (Ammerman 1987: 64). Forces which are inimical to the shared beliefs of the group, such as the temptations of a libertarian lifestyle tantalizingly portrayed by the mass media, are reinterpreted in a way that actually reinforces the dualistic structures that underpin the group's world view: such temptations become proof of Satan's active attempts to undermine God's people. Deviant bodies of belief are successfully reproduced in so far as their advocates are able to negotiate encounters with secular culture in a way that convincingly instils an alternative perspective on the world, often achieved through a subtle control of public discourse alongside the maintenance of close-knit networks of believers.

Studies adopting the sociology of knowledge approach popularized by Peter Berger are frequently used to buttress arguments for secularization, as their tendency to assume a straightforward correlation between the integrity of institutional boundaries and the robustness of religious belief systems is easily translated into a pessimistic prognosis for the future of religion. The fragmentation of communities is a well-documented feature of modernity, and there is a strong sociological tradition going back to Ferdinand Tönnies (1955) and H. Richard Niebuhr (1962) that associates the loosening of traditional, tightly knit bonds of community with the dissipation of social, including religious, values. Religious groups themselves have been vulnerable to the same processes, as population dispersion, increased mobility, and the emergence of a network society (Castells 1998) have undermined the appeal of traditional religious communities based on locality and inherited tradition. As religious values are less firmly embedded in wider social norms, and religious groups lack strong collective structures through which to socialize potential new members, so it becomes increasingly difficult to perpetuate religious traditions successfully (Bruce 2002). Within this context, how can the reproduction of religious values be successfully achieved? Arguments for structural differentiation lead to the same question, and point to the weakening control of religious institutions over processes of education, welfare, and health care, a trend that has, according to many thinkers, engendered a privatization of religion, with the expression of religious ideas and values reserved for the personal or family realm, leaving only very limited space for religion in the public sphere (e.g., Bruce 1995; Wilson 1992).

However, the Bergerian approach has not been without its detractors, from those who question its inbuilt conception of religious identity, which stresses cognitive functions at the expense of more emotional, intuitive, or non-rational motivations, to those critics who call for more detailed analysis of the empirical relationships that shape social structural influences upon patterns of religious belief (Wuthnow *et al.* 1984: 71). Responding to this second problem, some illuminating work has drawn on Arnold Gehlen's concept of secondary institutions, especially as inter-

preted by Berger, Berger, and Kellner in their seminal work on the social construction of modernity, *The Homeless Mind: Modernization and Consciousness* (1974). Within this analysis, secondary institutions emphasize individual autonomy and interpersonal exchange, and hence offer opportunities for free expression in a world which prizes subjectivity, but are sufficiently institutionalized to provide guidance and structure, hence offering some refuge for what Berger *et al.* called 'homeless minds', and also opportunities for a successful reproduction of shared values (Heelas and Woodhead 2000: 46). In exploring whether secondary institutions are effective carriers of religious meaning, Heelas and Woodhead (2000) point to the phenomenon of the small group meeting, increasingly popular in Evangelical, charismatic, and Pentecostal churches, especially in the USA. Here, the expressive dynamics of the support or encounter group are put to work in the service of Bible study, prayer, and mutual sharing, effectively fostering lay leadership, open expression, and inter-subjectivity as the basis of Christian identity (Miller 1997). It is the latter feature that is the focus of concerns expressed by Robert Wuthnow, who views the tendency of small groups to attribute meaning and truth to statements made by members on the basis of their 'experience' as an invitation to heterodox theologies, a fear heightened by the fact that many of the small groups that Wuthnow analysed in the US context were not monitored by religious specialists like a trained priest (Wuthnow 1994). In so far as the small group movement embodies the subjectivization that is associated with charismatic Christianity and many forms of alternative spirituality, then its power as a secondary institution to reproduce religious meanings may be compromised.

However, other studies of the use of small-scale, alternative community structures by religious groups suggest that a successful perpetuation of core values may be possible. For example, the learnt behaviours associated with prayer and ritualized episodes of charismatic possession often reinforce existing hierarchies and the ideologies they embody, as has been shown within the UK-based house churches of the 1970s and 1980s (Walker 1989), and in Roman Catholic Pentecostal prayer groups (McGuire 1982), also echoing I. M. Lewis's (1986) anthropological work on witchcraft and spirit possession, which highlights how apparently non-rational episodes may serve as vehicles for the reinforcement of existing power relations. Within more self-consciously liberal or culturally accommodating religious communities, such as 'post-Evangelical' or 'post-church' collectives, particularly notable in the UK and Australasia, a common narrative of spiritual progression is infused into internally generated rituals that are typically experimental and practical. These effectively convey a sense of shared identity and shared history among groups that often shy away from liturgical consistency or ideological uniformity (Guest and Taylor 2006; Jamieson 2002).

CONTEMPORARY CHALLENGES

More radical challenges to Berger's work have emerged from narratives of late modernity or postmodernity, which have emphasized institutional fragmentation and the breakdown of meta-narratives, drawing attention to 'the moral and ideological frameworks of modernity and their supercession by radical doubt, irony and transitoriness in post-modern conditions' (Beckford 2003: 187). Such accounts pose a challenge to the reproduction of religious values in two major ways. First, the sustainability of collective structures *per se* is called into question. Suspicion towards grand narratives and established authorities, so the story goes, reflects a weakening interest in community, so that individuals are motivated not by past loyalties or enduring affiliations, but by choices made according to personal preference. While most obviously evident in falling membership levels of political parties and trade unions, as well as churches, theorized by some as 'associational disconnection' (Percy 2004: 28), the effects of this shift are more profound. Hence Danielle Hervieu-Léger's (2000[1993]) work examines the phenomenon of 'cultural amnesia', which she sees as central to the transformations of religion in contemporary societies. Discussing the French case, she argues that the fragmentation of traditional institutions, most notably the breakdown of the extended family and connected rituals of parish life, has triggered a loss of collective memory among the population. Those institutions and practices that were once effective carriers of religious identities across generations have been compromised, so that a way of life based on inherited tradition has given way to a more consumer-oriented culture. This trend may be identified across Western Europe and beyond; as choice is elevated as sovereign, so more people, especially the young, are choosing to ignore the religiously infused traditions of the past and feel less obliged to instil their own children with a sense of their importance, preferring to raise them to make their own decisions. This trend is reflected in the findings of the European Values Survey which, in 1990, asked respondents to choose important qualities they felt children should be encouraged to learn in the family home. While 75 per cent—across all participating countries—chose 'tolerance and respect', only 25 per cent placed 'religious faith' in this category (Ashford and Timms 1992: 44, 63). It is against the background of these developments that sociological theorists have adopted the language of reflexive identity construction (Beck 1992; Giddens 1991), stressing individual agency and presenting values and convictions as things to be chosen, rather than inherited or nurtured within an institutional or family context.

This leads us to the second challenge, which concerns the orientation to religious phenomena that so-called postmodern changes foster in people. While some, following Anthony Giddens, have claimed that contemporary Western individualism

is incompatible with a commitment to traditional—including religious—bodies of knowledge or values, others observe a change of relationship between religious traditions and the postmodern individuals who engage with them (Beckford 1989; Bauman 1998; Lyon 2000; Mellor 1993). Conceived by some authors as a 'new religious consciousness' (Cohen *et al.* 1984), the argument here is that postmodern changes have not only encouraged a more individualistic, self-driven, perhaps consumerist orientation to religion, but that religious groups have in turn adjusted their own activities to better cater to this more fickle, transient market. Arguments about the so-called pic-'n'-mix nature of New Age or alternative spiritualities are well rehearsed, but there is strong evidence that a comparable development has emerged among more traditional religious groups. For example, many Christian congregations in the UK and the USA promote themselves less as a focus of local identity or lifelong commitment, and more as a spiritual resource at the disposal of the itinerant or upwardly mobile individual, seeking heightened experience, interpersonal affirmation, or temporary fellowship (Coleman 2000; Flory and Miller 2000; Guest 2007*b*). It appears that some religious groups, responding to wider cultural changes, have adjusted their priorities so that the perpetuation of shared values is subsumed within a project that is more episodal, more short-term, and more easily digested by participants whose long-term commitment can no longer be taken for granted.

The underlying process here is the deregulation of religion, the breakdown of tradition and traditional modes of engagement conceived more positively as the freeing up of religious forces from the structures and constraints of the past (Lyon 2000). This phenomenon is not a uniquely postmodern development; indeed, many sociologists have noted the distinctive case of the USA, its First Amendment securing the separation of church and state and thereby establishing a free religious market which has fostered a grass-roots spiritual entrepreneurialism throughout the history of that nation (Hatch 1989). The lack of an established church effectively generated the conditions for a deregulated religious economy, in which religious pluralism was tolerated and religious affiliation accepted as a matter of personal choice (Finke 1990). Addressing the broader, global context, David Lyon places religious deregulation at the heart of the postmodern world, accelerated by the processes of globalization, the dynamics of late capitalism, and time-space compression associated with advanced technology and the growth of the Internet, all of which destabilize inherited traditions and conventional boundaries of identity (Lyon 2000). This constellation of factors has framed much of the current debate about the status of religious phenomena, and while some theorists continue to take the public dimension of religion seriously (e.g., Casanova 1994), the widespread popularity of postmodern narratives describing de-traditionalization, fragmentation, relativization, and multiple identities has emphasized the devolution of power to the individual seeker at the expense of the identity-defining power of collective structures. The diversification of religion in

the West, together with the rise of fundamentalism, has exacerbated this imbalance, highlighting both the increasing impotence of established traditions and the power of individual commitment.

Yet institutions and collective structures continue to play an important role in the processes whereby religious identities are transmitted and reproduced. First, they frame wider cultural forces that shape the changing possibilities open to religious groups. Even a market model of contemporary religion needs to take account of processes of production as well as consumption, and the symbolic resources pertinent to the construction of religious identities are made available to individuals via their experience of more immediate interactive contexts, whether a local church or mosque, Wiccan network or web-based spiritualist discussion forum, each embodying wider social trends. Second, they serve as primary contexts in which the reproduction of religious values and identities is steered and managed. The most obvious examples here might be schools, families, and places of worship, institutional contexts that are often sites for the socialization of individuals into a set of moral and religious values, although more innovative analyses might point to new forms of collective identity, such as the 'bund' or 'neo-tribe', which represent attempts to use the resources of postmodernity in the construction of communities based around interest, protest, or enthusiasm (Bromley 1988; Maffesoli 1996). The World Wide Web creates new opportunities here, but novel forms of community have also emerged in less radical contexts, among friendship networks or informal post-church groups, for example (Jamieson 2002). The cultural transitions associated with Western modernization may have altered the form and influence of these collective structures, but they have not entirely undermined their capacity to shape identities and thereby influence processes of religious change. It will be instructive to look at some examples from recent research that illustrate this point.

MCDONALDIZATION AND RELIGIOUS IDENTITY

In 1996, George Ritzer published his influential volume *The McDonaldization of Society*, offering a critical analysis of late twentieth-century Western culture in terms derived from the management model associated with the well-known fast food franchise. Picking up on Max Weber's arguments about the rationalization of social processes in the modern age, Ritzer highlights the standardization represented by McDonald's, and uses this to throw into question the assumption that a market-driven global economy ensures a diversity of products and endless

consumer choice. What you get at McDonald's is the same the world over, in terms of both service and product. Moreover, the same kind of standardization, so Ritzer argues, can be found in the spheres of education, leisure, politics, health care, and work, in both private businesses and public services. What Ritzer identifies are economically driven policies of working practice that have filtered down into various other cultural contexts, in which they have become normative. He defines McDonaldization in terms of the fourfold model of calculability, efficiency, predictability, and control, key features of the well-honed McDonald's management system designed to maximize profit across a global market (Ritzer 1996).

In showing how 'free' global markets may engender uniformity, rather than variety, Ritzer also highlights how the identity politics of late modernity are constrained by structural factors. Globalization may generate new choices for consumers, but the range of choices on offer is predetermined by unseen economic forces and may actually frustrate, rather than empower, movements of cultural innovation. While it may seem odd to associate religion with McDonald's, the model that Ritzer describes has been wilfully adopted by a range of religious organizations, many of which have embraced McDonaldization as a convenient means of standardizing their processes of promotion and recruitment. Similar notions have filtered into popular understandings of religious identity, and John Drane has referred to the widespread desire for predictability in the spiritual journey (2000: 44), exemplified in the notion of 'stages of faith', and embodied in spiritual retreats and self-help books that reflect a yearning for structural coherence in an otherwise relatively unstable religious economy. In the process, religions are often 'packaged', their message reconfigured into a consumer product so as to be more readily accessible to the late modern individual. Not surprisingly, this trend has appealed most to missionizing groups, for the dynamics of global consumerism are well suited to their proselytizing ambitions. For example, Richard Bartholomew (2006) has studied the expansion of the evangelical publishing industry, arguing that conservative Protestant leaders consolidate their popular appeal, and thereby their evangelistic potential, by acquiring the status of brand names, used in the global marketing of their message.

The most striking example of the McDonaldization of religion is the Alpha Course, the ten-week introduction to Christianity that has been packaged, exported, and promoted with an efficiency that would be the envy of many private businesses. In 1991, there were four churches running Alpha courses; by 1999, the number quoted by its organizers was 11,430, based all over the world, in prisons and universities as well as in local churches. According to Peter Brierley, 'by the end of 2005, 2 million people in the UK and 8 million worldwide had attended an Alpha course' (2006: 229). Holy Trinity, Brompton (HTB), the famous charismatic Evangelical church in London that launched and has continued to be the administrative centre of Alpha, has overseen the development of the course and its carefully managed promotion through an entire industry of accompanying

merchandise: books, videos, and CDs, sweatshirts and car-stickers. The Revd Nicky Gumbel's *Questions of Life*, on which the course is based, has now been translated into twenty-eight languages and has sold 500,000 copies (Hunt 2004: 14–15). Critics of Alpha argue that the course reduces Evangelism to a comfortable and predictable process, and in so doing risks trivializing Christian commitment (e.g., Ward 1998). Its carefully controlled presentation of Christianity is also accused of a heavy bias towards a particular form of charismatic Evangelicalism to the exclusion of other avenues of Christian faith, and HTB's application of the principles of calculability, predictability, efficiency, and control has meant that this agenda has been very difficult to challenge. Course materials are produced centrally, cover all possible media, and HTB has affirmed its willingness to invoke copyright law as a way of preventing local adaptations of the Alpha programme, thus pre-empting any grass-roots efforts to adjust its charismatic Evangelical message to reflect better the diversity across the churches.

Alpha's appropriation of fashionable management styles in the service of Christian Evangelism represents an effort to control the reproduction of religious identities in accordance with an Evangelical agenda. However, Stephen Hunt's UK-based research suggests that the course is relatively unsuccessful at securing long-term converts. In his survey of Alpha participants in England and Wales, he discovered that only 8 per cent were non-believers with no church experience; 16.3 per cent were agnostics with some experience of church life; while 74.4 per cent had some connection with the church running the course. Hunt also found that only one in six participants actually converted to Christianity (Hunt 2004: 171, 186). It would appear that, sociologically speaking, the processes of controlled production and delivery associated with McDonaldisation need to be distinguished analytically from the engagement of individuals with the ideas and values embedded in those processes. Alpha is perhaps best seen as an attractive channel for the revitalization of Christian identity, rather than an effective means of transmitting religious ideas to the uninitiated. Issues of audience receptiveness are clearly important here, and participation and exposure do not, of course, equate to long-term, or even short-term, commitment. One way of exploring this problem further might appeal to lifestyle affinities. Alpha has often been criticized for presenting Christianity using typically middle-class styles of engagement—a shared meal, public talks, discussion groups—which are likely to alienate many working-class participants. While the destabilization of class identities in late modernity arguably demands a more complex analysis, an examination of how styles of presentation resonate with some social groups more than others reminds us of how the success with which religious ideas are transmitted relates to factors of wealth, occupational networks, or lifestyle. The selective appeal of web-based religion provides an obvious case study (Brasher 2001).

McDonaldisation also highlights tendencies that feature in attempts to control expressions of religion in the public sphere. For example, one might point to recent

efforts by the UK government to rein in processes of 'radicalization' among the Muslim population as part of an attempt to pre-empt acts of terrorism. A desire to engage with imams and exert influence over processes of teaching in local mosques, madrasahs, and state universities, including the accreditation of professional religious qualifications, reflects attempts by state powers to realign Islamic identity with a particular model of the faith organization, highlighting its function as a source of social cohesion. But while the politicians affirm integration and tolerance, many Muslim leaders fear the dilution of core principles of faith and the imposition of a secular liberal agenda. Here, the micro-management associated with the New Labour Government can be seen to embody some of the forces associated with McDonaldization, which are applied in a quest to delimit the moral-religious landscape and shape the reproduction of religious identities in accordance with its own policies (Birt 2006). Indeed, notions of standardization and control are implicit in government affirmations of religion, which emphasize co-operation, civic responsibility, and tradition, while de-legitimizing expressions of faith that significantly deviate from the 'liberal consensus' or that preach loyalty to minority causes over loyalty to Britain.

THE PERSISTENT IMPORTANCE OF THE FAMILY

If McDonaldization highlights how economic forces may be filtered through cultural institutions, and thereby shape the reproduction of religious identities, the family presents us with a primary context in which religious values are nurtured under the direction of intimates within the private sphere. While earlier research into secularization paid relatively little attention to the family as a key site for the reproduction of religious ideas, recent studies have reaffirmed its importance. For example, Voas and Crockett have appealed to British survey data in arguing that a child's upbringing has 'an enormous impact on their subsequent propensity to identify with a religion' (Voas and Crockett 2005: 19), further identifying the extent to which parents share religious convictions as crucial to their relative success in transmitting religious values to their children. Moreover, intermarriage—that is, marriage between individuals of different faiths—not only compromises the effective socialization of religion into the next generation; it also adversely affects the capacity of the partners themselves to sustain their original religious identities (Voas 2003). While such analyses illuminate general trends, they do not address the actual processes of value transmission operative within families;

this requires ethnographic observation at a more micro-level, although the comparatively closed nature of family life has often made empirical research both practically and ethically difficult.

In recent years, the work of historian Callum Brown has marked a welcome corrective to this imbalance, his influential book *The Death of Christian Britain* (2001) placing the family at the heart of the secularization process. Appealing to evidence in oral history records, Brown traces the process whereby British Christianity shifted from being 'overwhelmingly discursive' (2001: 195), emphasizing Evangelical themes of purity and virtue, which were conflated with popular notions of respectability, to being associated more with a deliberate commitment to regular churchgoing. He places the axis of this change in the 1960s, arguing that a radical change in the role of women was a key causal factor. For Brown, women had hitherto occupied the role of guardian of the family and its salvation, had maintained a Christian discourse, and had overseen the enforcement of its moral code. With the change in women's roles in the 1960s, triggered by the free availability of the contraceptive pill and changing perceptions of domestic proprieties, these structures were compromised. Children were henceforth no longer socialized as effectively into Christian mores and practices, and subsequent generations ceased to be as articulate in a Christian discourse (Brown 2001: 183). Christianity is transformed into a religion of choice, but suffers from no longer being as intimately enveloped within normal family life.

A rather different configuration of factors is presented in Christian Smith's recent study, *Soul Searching*, which reports on a large-scale empirical investigation into the religious lives of American teenagers. Smith interviewed teenagers with a variety of religious affiliations across the United States, using these conversations to explore the shape and source of their religious identities. His main finding was that most young people are confused and inarticulate about religion, thus raising the question of how effective conventional agents of religious socialization really are. If expressions of religious commitment are confused and unclear, then does this support the argument, advanced by some advocates of secularization, that institutions in the West are no longer capable of successfully transmitting religious values to the younger generations, either because the boundaries of religious traditions are no longer clearly defined or because of the emphasis placed on allowing young people lifestyle choices? Smith's research counts against this argument. He discovered that adults still exert a significant influence over the values of their teenaged children, claiming that the majority of American youths 'faithfully mirror the aspirations, lifestyles, practices, and problems of the adult world into which they are being socialized' and, in addition, seem 'basically content to follow the faith of their families with little questioning' (Smith 2005: 191, 120).

Smith's research raises several challenges pertinent to wider debates about the trajectories of religious development in the contemporary West. First, the fact that the young people he interviewed do not appear to construct their religious

identities in rebellion against parents, institutions, or dominant authorities raises the possibility that such patterns do not characterize generational change within the modern period as a whole, but are particular to the cultural experiences of the baby boomers (Roof 1993). Second, Smith finds that very few young people had considered practising other faiths or related to the ideas associated with spiritual seekership (2005: 127–9). In this sense the argument for religious deregulation may be overstated, or at least needs to distinguish between the existence of a religious market and the propensity of such conditions to generate an eclectic or nomadic orientation to religious identity. It also throws into question the issue of choice, and invites further research into the conditions that provoke young people to challenge the ideas and values inherited from their parents. In this case, inter-generational continuity, rather than rebellion, appears to be the norm, not because choice was not held up as an important value, it was; however, most youths *chose* to remain in general conformity with the values of their parents. One might reflect on the role that the cultural conditions of contemporary North America have played in fostering this trend. Indeed, future research faces the intriguing question of how choice and dissent are related in Western democracies. Moreover, why do discourses of religious freedom and individualism so often mask an underlying social conservatism that engenders religious inertia rather than innovation or socio-political engagement?

Finally, the inarticulacy of American youth when it comes to religion is worthy of further note. Smith finds that the vast majority of those he interviewed ‘simply could not express themselves on matters of God, faith, religion, or spiritual life’ (2005: 133). It appears that parents were successful in transmitting a sense of the significance and authenticity of their religious tradition, but were less so in communicating the precise meaning of its various core doctrines and practices. Instead, young people tended to affirm a more generic set of priorities that Smith summarizes as ‘Moralistic Therapeutic Deism’, based on (i) the importance of being a good person, pleasant and respectful; (ii) religion conceived as a source of subjective well-being; and (iii) belief in a God who is distant, aside from when he is called upon to help those in need (2005: 162–71). Hence, while Smith’s work supports the contention that the family continues to be an important site for the formation of religious identity in the USA, it also highlights the presence of more diffuse constellations of ideas, which are perhaps reflective of a dominant discourse—characterized by a ‘soft’ individualism—prevalent across the wider culture. Again, macro-level social structural forces influence the reproduction of religious identities in a way that generates patterns closer to standardization than postmodern diversity. Most strikingly, Smith’s study highlights how the subjective individualism argued by some to be at the heart of dominant forms of contemporary religion (e.g., Heelas and Woodhead 2005), may engender not creativity and diversity, but stasis and perhaps social conservatism.

CONCLUSION: THE REPRODUCTION AND TRANSMISSION OF RELIGIOUS CAPITAL

The examples above highlight the limitations of an approach that places too much emphasis on the power of the individual to shape his or her own religious identity, and suggest the need to take institutional factors more seriously. Yet they also highlight a need to move beyond the functionalist approaches of the past (Parsons 1951), the late modern context demanding a more complex theorization of religious identity formation and its relationship to wider social forces. Significant potential may be found in an approach based on a resource mobilization perspective; specifically, a capital-centred perspective, building on the work of Pierre Bourdieu, offers a fruitful approach to understanding the reproduction of religious identities in the contemporary world, and I offer an account of this as a concluding proposal. This approach focuses on the resources associated with religion: their generation, evolution, transmission, and rejection, hence taking account of dynamic processes of reproduction in a way that moves beyond institutions and individual agents. It takes seriously the processes whereby individuals are empowered by religious resources, while framing those resources in relation to the broader social structural conditions that shape their status and distribution. In this sense, it can cope with the heightened sense of agency associated with postmodernity, but insist on a theorization of a broader social field that both facilitates and limits that agency in ways that shape the process whereby religious identities are formed and religious resources reproduced. In proceeding from a metaphor of exchange and circulation, capital theory is especially suited to a deregulated religious landscape, in which religion has become decentred, adrift from its former points of anchorage (Beckford 1989), and available for deployment and reconfiguration in more novel ways.

Ultimately, of course, the theorization of resources as capital derives from the work of Karl Marx, although various developments—for example, human capital, social capital, cultural capital—have emerged in the work of Gary Becker, James Coleman, and Robert Putnam, among others. Some sociologists have applied these theories to the analysis of religious phenomena, as with attempts by Iannacone (1990) and Neuman (1986) to apply Becker's concept of 'human capital' in understanding trends in religious practice, and Andrew Greeley's (1997) application of James Coleman's (1988) work, which analyses religious structures as a source of social capital. Others have sought to acknowledge the peculiar characteristics of religion as a resource by developing a separate theory of religious or spiritual capital, and Pierre Bourdieu has been the most creative thinker within this category. In his articles on religion, Bourdieu is heavily indebted to Max Weber, particularly in adopting an essentially economic model of religious practice (Weber 1978; Bourdieu 1987; 1991).

In keeping with his general theory of capital as a scarce resource within a given social field, Bourdieu identifies the 'resources' at stake in the 'religious field'. These are 'the legitimation of the social order, the sanction of wealth and power, and the sense of meaning that religion brings to people's lives' (Rey 2004: 337). In this sense, networks of power often occupy overlapping social fields, so that a position of dominance in the world of finance, for example, may draw in part from symbolic capital accumulated in the fields of culture or religion. This insight reflects Bourdieu's concern that religious specialists appeal to relations of power in non-religious spheres in order to consolidate their position, just as secular powers appeal to religious language and associations in justifying their own.

While Bourdieu's theory is shaped by a rather heavy-handed Marxism, and owes much to the context of French Roman Catholicism, including a suspicion of the power invested in its priesthood, it has been appropriated and developed in recent studies to great effect. Terry Rey (2004) has adopted Bourdieu's conflict model to illuminate tensions in Haiti, between the Roman Catholic hierarchy and popular voodoo priests. Both parties are locked in a struggle over religious capital, particularly what Bourdieu calls the 'goods of salvation': that is, sacraments, membership of a religious community, and any other condition deemed necessary for salvation. Their attempts to clearly distinguish Roman Catholicism from voodoo represent an effort to control the religious field and vie for the allegiance of a poor lay audience who see the two traditions as intertwined. The transmission of religion is shaped by a continual quest for cultural dominance, and the resources at stake represent distinctive forms of power defined by the social field in which they are operative.

In an attempt to extend the interpretative reach of Bourdieu's theory so as to reflect the complexities of deregulation characteristic of advanced Western cultures, American sociologist Bradford Verter develops the more malleable notion of 'spiritual capital'. Within such contexts, sources of spiritual significance are not restricted by the boundaries of traditional religious hierarchies, as Bourdieu's original argument might suggest, but are more freely available within a complex matrix of exchange (Guest 2007a). Verter argues that Bourdieu's categories are 'too rigid to account for the fluidities of today's spiritual marketplace', preferring to speak of 'spiritual capital', 'a more widely diffused commodity, governed by more complex patterns of production, distribution, exchange, and consumption' (Verter 2003: 151, 158). Moreover, critiquing the work of rational choice theorists like Rodney Stark and Roger Finke, who conceive of 'spiritual capital' as a free-floating commodity in an open market of exchange (Stark and Finke 2000), Verter is faithful to Bourdieu's analysis of social power. For Verter, competitors for spiritual capital do not enjoy equal advantages; nor do they accumulate spiritual capital purely on the basis of individual effort. Rather, individuals occupy positions of relative strength or weakness, depending on the capital they possess, and on their relationship to the processes that shape the distribution of that capital. In other

words, the relative distribution of spiritual capital is shaped by wider structures of power, highlighting how that capital is fluid and transferable between fields (Swartz 1996: 78).

Verter's development of Bourdieu's theory presents attractive possibilities for the analysis of the reproduction of religious identities. It preserves an account of individual agency, while taking seriously how resources pertinent to religion have become more fluid in late modernity, yet remain caught up in wider structures of power. In this respect it moves beyond a simplistic market model and avoids the problematic instrumentalism of rational choice theory, which presents individuals as driven by calculated self-interest to the exclusion of more altruistic or collective goals. In a study of clergy families co-written by the author, the concept of spiritual capital was used to illuminate processes of value transmission across generations (Davies and Guest 2007). Moving beyond stereotypical images of child conformity and rebellion, we found that the children of senior Anglican clergy in England inherited a fluid spiritual capital which had its origins in their experiences of being raised in a vicarage, but which was deployed in adult life in the service of broader projects of identity construction. Recalled moral exemplars were used to explain current orientations to professional life; a deep-seated sense of moral duty and sacrifice shaped decisions to pursue public service jobs or engage in civic responsibilities; post-sermon family discussions fostered an awareness of religious and moral issues and a confidence in one's own point of view. However, what is externally viewed as spiritual capital can also be experienced as negative, so that a familiarity with priests at an early age can undermine any sense that they embody a spiritual purity. Similarly having a father who is a bishop can diminish one's own sense of religious identity, as outsiders may often measure the child by lofty moral and theological standards.

Three insights emerge from this application, pertinent to wider sociological debates about the reproduction of religion. First, in tracing the processes whereby spiritual capital is acquired, developed, transformed, and transmitted, we arrive at a clearer understanding of the processes of identity construction, both across and between generations. Second, our study highlights how spiritual capital may be applied in a complex analysis of religious leadership, incorporating notions of power that move beyond individual agency and position, and extend to broader networks. Third, our identification of spiritual capital as a resource deployed in the service not merely of personal advancement, but of community building and altruistic expression, highlights possibilities for further critiques of rational choice theory, which preserve a critical understanding of power, while allowing for the coexistence of an emerging social fabric which has the same roots. In other words, the reproduction of religious identities within late modernity may be reconceived so as to address socio-religious power as a potentially constructive, as well as potentially fragmentary, phenomenon. One challenge of future sociological research will be responsibly to disentangle the two.

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SUGGESTED READING

The following are recommended: Berger (1967); Bourdieu (1987); Brown (2001); Davies and Guest (2007); Smith (2005); and Verter (2003).