

« RELIGION AND SOCIAL CLASS »

CALL FOR PAPERS

Annual conference of the AFSR
Paris, February 5-6th 2018



Organizers:

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Ranging from the Marxist critique of religion as “the opium of the people” to Pierre Bourdieu’s reflections on the social functions of religion, as well as the connections established by Max Weber between religion, class and status, the relationships between religion and social class have constituted a classic issue for the social sciences. With the success of the “moyennisation” theory, and the gradual decline of Marxist social sciences, reflections on the role of social class have nonetheless been on the wane. The contemporary emphasis on religious individualization has also tended to obscure the influence of social factors, suggesting that religious or spiritual experiences are now independent from social structures. Moreover, the incorporation of new dimensions to the analysis of religion, such as gender, migration, race or ethnicity has also pushed social class to the background. Without questioning the obvious contribution of the literature relying on other categories of analysis, nor denying the central existence of individualization processes in the religious realm, this conference aims at shedding new light on social class issues, by revisiting classic scholarship with contemporary data.

Beyond the field of the social sciences of religion, research on social class is currently booming. New empirical studies, relying on ethnography for the most part, along with

energetic debates fostered by the development of a European statistical apparatus, have renewed the reflection on social class. The analytical locus has progressively broadened from the professional realm alone to the whole of social realms. Such extended focus on lifestyles has also been combined to a greater attention paid to their territorial embeddedness and differentiation (and the relational construction of social class through spatial segregation). However, the bulk of social class research (be it on the working class or the upper class) tends to conceal the issue of religious practice. This conference arises from the conviction that renewed approaches in social class scholarship can contribute to improve our understanding of religious phenomena, and that religion can also provide a heuristic perspective on social stratification.

The conference will take place in Paris **on February 5-6th, 2018** and will give rise to an edited volume. We welcome contributions from all disciplines in social sciences, hinging upon qualitative or quantitative analyses alike, and investigating religion in all its varieties. We will ensure that the diversity of religious expressions, geographical and cultural areas is represented. Paper proposals can fall under one of the following axes:

Axis 1

Legitimization or subversion: the role of religion in reproducing or challenging social inequalities

Religions typically produce discourses on social order and social structures. They provide believers with tools to interpret the world, including social inequalities. Historically, religious discourses have been used to either legitimize such inequalities (theodicy of suffering for the most deprived and theodicy of good fortune for the most well-off), or to openly challenge them (theology of liberation). How do religious people reinterpret their social class position in religious terms? What is the role of religion in social movements? A symbolic representation of reality, can religion contribute to modify it? We welcome contributions exploring how the legitimization/subversion couple is reconfigured in contemporary religious expressions. In that regard, the role of religious education (and religious schools) in the reproduction of social hierarchies can be investigated.

Axis 2

The social determiners of religion

We invite papers investigating whether and how religious goods are structured across social milieus. Max Weber had already identified elective affinities between individuals' (or groups') social position and their beliefs. Do material conditions of existence continue to determine religious preferences? The role of sociability networks (tied to social status and spatial location) in structuring religious options can for instance be explored. The issue of social

mobility (upward or downward) can also be examined: do changes in social or residential status impact religious practice? Do changes in religious belonging, notably through the incorporation of new ethical norms and practices, contribute to upward mobility or lead on the contrary to social downgrading?

The issue of distinction is also central and we welcome contributions highlighting the role of religious belonging as a marker of respectability and social prestige, for individuals who are either privileged or disadvantaged at the material level.

Congregational “styles” or styles of religious practice can also be brought to light. Do repertoires of prayer, sermons, liturgy or religious *mise en scène* differ across social positions (Sean McCloud, 2007)? Since most literature focuses on working-class religion, we welcome papers describing the religious practices of the upper and middle classes as well.

Finally, we invite contributions investigating the role of social class in the contemporary reconfigurations of religion, especially regarding the issue of “bricolage” and the specific skills it requires: is religious “bricolage” the prerogative of the upper class? Who invents new ways of living religion? To what extent is the ability to embrace the “Other,” which currently inspires the personal appropriation of so-called “exotic” religious traditions (Véronique Altglas, 2014), a variable of social position?

Axis 3

Categories and classification struggles

A last axis, more epistemologically-oriented, will focus on the academic usage of representations and categories, such as the notion of “popular religion” (the object of many scientific debates in France in the 60-70s) or “religion from below” (Guy Duboscq, Bernard Plongeron & Daniel Robert, 1979 ; Serge Bonnet, 2016). In which contexts are these concepts used? Should they be understood in contrast to a bourgeois, aristocratic, clerical or expert religion? The working-class has frequently been accused of distorting orthodox beliefs and practices, by favoring marvels and emotions over reason, that is of transforming religion into superstition or folklore. Rural Christianity has for instance long been depicted as carrying tenacious pagan or agrarian elements. Moreover, some religions, such as Pentecostalism, and to a lesser extent Islam, are consistently associated with the lower classes. Are these representations empirically substantiated? Or do they reveal categorical biases, such as the implicit opposition between on the one hand rationality and self-control, as claimed by the upper class, and on the other hand the fervor and emotion of the working-class?

The issue of social hierarchies within religious traditions and their effects on the production of religious knowledge and the definition of orthodoxy, an issue that has been studied in the case of Judaism for instance (Béatrice de Gasquet, 2012), can also be taken into account.

Finally, the focus on “fundamentalism” (and more recently on “radicalization”), which has long been perceived as the doing of uneducated working-classes (even when empirical data proved the contrary, see Susan Harding, 1991), can also be examined.

Guidelines for submission

We welcome contributions in both French or English. Paper proposals must be sent by **September 10th, 2017**.

They must include the name and first name of the author, her institution, e-mail address, a short bio blurb, the title of the paper, the axis it falls under, and a one-page abstract summarizing the main points of interest and the data that has been used.

They must be sent in Word or PDF format to Anthony Favier (anthony.favier@live.com), Yannick Fer (yannick.fer@gsrl.cnrs.fr), Juliette Galonnier (juliette.galonnier@gmail.com), and Ana Perrin-Heredia (aperrinheredia@gmail.com).

Participants will be notified at the beginning of October 2017.