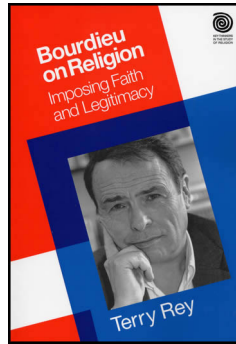


## ○ REVIEW OF TERRY REY, *BOURDIEU ON RELIGION: IMPOSING FAITH AND LEGITIMACY* (LONDON: EQUINOX, 2007)

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*Bourdieu on Religion: Imposing Faith and Legitimacy*, by Terry Rey, is an excellent resource. The book is exactly what it promises to be: an introduction for use in undergraduate and introductory graduate courses to the elements of Pierre Bourdieu's (rather large) corpus relevant to the study of religion. It is substantial in its description of Bourdieu's project, yet clearly written and relatively jargon free.

The text contains an introduction, five chapters, and a conclusion. The introduction initially presents Bourdieu as if he were extremely critical and entirely negative in his interpretation of religious traditions. For Bourdieu, it seems, religion is primarily about the "establishment, legitimization, and reproduction of social inequality and all of its incumbent injustices" (5). (To be fair to Bourdieu, he generally finds this to be true not only for religion but for human cultures in general.) Rey points out that this sort of approach to the study of religion is difficult for those scholars who are interested in the "positive side of religion" (6). However, while it is certainly the case that Bourdieu is a master of the hermeneutics of suspicion, throughout the book Rey presents Bourdieu as much less one sided. For instance, Rey demonstrates that in his research on Algeria, Bourdieu emphasizes the ways in which the Islamic tradition there was enabling for women's autonomy. As a result of this and other examples, Rey ends up presenting a version of Bourdieu that is sincerely ambivalent about religion, rather than simply negative.

The first chapter provides a brief outline of Bourdieu's biography, his career, and the influences on his thought (including, not surprisingly, Weber, Marx, and Durkheim, as well as philosophers such as Merleau-Ponty, Heidegger, and Sartre).

The second chapter outlines Bourdieu's central concepts: *practice* ("what people do in society"), *habitus* (the "part of [human] personhood that filters their perceptions, molds their tastes, and casts their inclinations and dispositions") (39), material and symbolic *capital* (what people struggle to acquire), and *field* (the structured context or location in which practices and struggles

take place). Habitus is probably the most important of these concepts. A person's habitus is the product of a process of socialization, a process that produces an individual's "practical sense" (her ability to navigate the rules of local social games) and her dispositions. As I understand it, to use a stereotype as an example, a wealthy white woman socialized in the American South internalizes certain rules that structure her social role and social practices – her habitus will become the source of her practical ability to behave "appropriately" in "polite society," for instance, as well as to make the best use of the possibilities and limitations that are assigned to someone of her age, gender, class, social standing, etc., in both public and private contexts. In addition, her socialization incorporates certain dispositions into her habitus – she may find women who are "forward" (women with a different habitus, a different practical sense, and a different set of dispositions) to be distasteful and rude.

For Bourdieu, in a manner very similar to Foucault's understanding of power and agency, field and habitus are mutually constitutive of one another. As Rey puts it, "there is no player without the game ... and no game without the player" (47). For Rey, this circular relation between the social structure and an individual habitus is important as it undermines any strict one-way structural determination that would leave no room for human agency. Nevertheless, the leverage available to agents who wish to effect change is determined largely by the shape of the existing field; Rey quotes Bourdieu: "[agents] *can succeed* only to the extent that ... they manage to re-activate dispositions which previous processes of inculcation have deposited in people's bodies" (130).

The third chapter discusses the contents of each of Bourdieu's ten writings that focus on religion. These writings present religious traditions as institutional centers that socialize individuals in such a way as to produce habits of thought and dispositions that reinforce or add to the authority, privilege, or capital of the religious institution. Subjects socialized by these institutions "misrecognize" the social order in which they live as natural rather than created; as a result, the "status quo" is legitimized and sustained. In sum, Bourdieu portrays religious institutions as machines for the distribution of an ideology that sustains the asymmetrical relations of power in a society.

In the fourth chapter Rey departs from his commentary on Bourdieu and uses the theoretical tools provided by his work to understand the relationships between the indigenous Wampanoag and white colonists in colonial New England. Most of the details about this community are derived from David Silverman's book, *Faith and Boundaries: Colonists, Christianity, and Community among the Wampanoag Indians of Martha's Vineyard, 1600–1871*. (As this chapter assumes some prior knowledge of the relationship between British colonialists and Native Americans in New England, it would appear to be more accessible to readers already familiar with this book – pedagogically this chapter might best be paired with a chapter or two from Silverman's book.) Rey explains that the colonialist white Christians in this community were socialized into a tradition that rendered their own religion as superior to the culture of the Wampanoag. This justified, in their minds, their domination over the indigenous natives. While the whites did not enslave the Wampanoag, they did institute a social hierarchy according to which the Wampanoag were largely restricted to servile roles. Because the Christian group was the dominant group, participation in the Christian community was an important condition of upward mobility for the Wampanoag. Although they viewed Christianity differently than the white invaders, insofar as they "believed that their traditional religion and Christianity formed two intertwined trunks to

a single religious tree” (85), one native born to a converted Christian mother left his mother’s Baptist tradition and joined the more dominant Puritan tradition as a preacher, thereby “embark[ing] on a path of upward social mobility that was unsurpassed among the Wampanoag of his day” (98). Quoting Silverman’s book, Rey ends on an ambivalent note, suggesting that although much of the Wampanoag culture was lost, nevertheless “Christianity ... bound the Wampanoags together and helped sustain them as a people” (103).

The fifth chapter goes beyond the explanation and application of Bourdieu’s work to consider how scholars in the discipline of religion have received Bourdieu. Rey briefly discusses the innovative uses of Bourdieu by Catherine Bell and others, and then considers “limitations” to Bourdieu’s approach. The latter section is perhaps the best in the book – here Rey generously acknowledges where critics are right on target and kindly defends Bourdieu against criticisms based on an insufficiently nuanced reading of Bourdieu’s work. Of particular interest is the fact that Bourdieu’s understanding of “religious fields” is unnecessarily dichotomous. That is, Bourdieu seems to describe religious fields as strictly structured by an orthodoxy and a heterodoxy. The laity, in this field, appears as little more than the spoils of the war between these two institutions. Rey accepts this criticism and admits that the relationships between competing religious institutions and laity are much more complex.

Although the text is well suited for undergraduate courses, it will be more accessible to students with prior familiarity with Marx, Weber, and Durkheim. I would not hesitate to use it late in the semester in a 100-level course on “sociology of religion” or “religion and culture,” or in 300 or 400-level courses on theory and method in the study of religion, but I would hesitate to use it in a 100-level introduction to the study of religion or an introduction to “world religions.” Students entirely uninitiated in the study of religion would probably find the nuanced reading of the differences between 19th and 20th century sociologists of religion difficult to digest.

Bourdieu’s approach to the study of religion might be most appropriate for scholars in Biblical studies interested in considering how the Bible functions as ideology or propaganda. In addition, the concept of habitus could be utilized to analyze the manner in which subjects are habituated to view certain texts or discourses as authoritative. I could envision using this text in an advanced course on the transmission of the authority of the Bible and its use in the manipulation of the “religious field” and the acquisition of “religious capital,” as well as other forms of “capital.”

In conclusion, I found Rey’s text to be extremely accessible, balanced, and appropriately sensitive to existing criticisms of Bourdieu’s project. I would not hesitate to recommend it for use in undergraduate courses.