

Pierre Bourdieu, Religion, and Cultural Production

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Recent years have seen increased emphasis on the autonomy of human agency in creating meaning in everyday life. The institutional bias in sociology, however, and its concomitant emphasis on social reproduction rather than change favors hierarchical approaches to cultural production. This is apparent in the theorizing even of sociologists such as Pierre Bourdieu who emphasize the cultural dynamism of religion and other meaning systems. This article critiques the mechanistic underpinnings of Bourdieu's perspective on religious production and his categorical differentiation between religious producers and consumers. Using data gathered from American Catholics, the author shows that interpretive autonomy allows them to recast the official discourse of the church hierarchy in ways that advance alternative interpretations. Interpretive autonomy is grounded in the Catholic tradition or habitus and is reflexively used by Catholics both to maintain the vibrancy of the church and expand the possibilities for institutional change.

An important contribution of cultural studies has been to enhance awareness of the significance of ordinary, everyday lived practices in the production of meaning. The early empirical work of the Birmingham School (e.g., Hall & Jefferson, 1976) demonstrated that the production of meaning is multilayered and diffuse. Contrary to a top-down analysis of cultural production that privileges production as the determining influence on the "reception" of meaning, several studies show that the content of any symbolic production (e.g., soap operas, romance novels, news accounts) is open to multiple interpretations and uses. These interpretations, moreover, can be quite autonomous of the "objective" content inscribed at the official point of production (see, for example, Hall, 1973; Hall & Jefferson, 1976; Press, 1991; Radway, 1994). Interpretive activity is thus an active, creative process that is socially, historically, and locally contextualized. In this view, as Dorothy Smith (1990) observed, all "texts are indexical" because their "meaning is not fully contained in them but completed in the setting of their reading" (p. 197). In making sense of the meanings packaged by a producer, the interpreter creates new meanings. Accordingly, the reception or interpretation of meaning is itself part of the meaning production

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process (Thompson, 1990, pp. 316-317). Yet, this is an aspect of cultural production that is often marginalized by sociologists who, because of their interest in mechanisms of social *reproduction* (e.g., Bourdieu, 1984), tend to give short shrift to the dynamic and open-ended nature of the *production/consumption* process itself.

Recognition of the relative fluidity of interpretive/cultural production illuminates aspects of social life that otherwise may appear somewhat enigmatic. One such puzzle is presented by the continuing significance of religious participation for many Americans in this time of late- or postmodernity. Observers of a postmaterialist cultural shift see traditional religious symbols losing their relevance outside of their original setting (e.g., Inglehart, 1990, p. 179). Yet, it is evident that whereas in some contexts, religion serves culturally defensive purposes (cf. Bauman, 1997, pp. 182-185; Castells, 1997), in other situations, religion is used as an emancipatory resource in the creation of more participative structures (Dillon, 1999). Even though sociologists see religion as a symbolic system (e.g., Berger, 1967; Bourdieu, 1991a, 1991b, 1998) and increasingly pay attention to its interpretive and cultural dimensions (e.g., Dillon, 1999; Kniss, 1997; Wuthnow, 1992), the insights derived from cultural studies research have not been applied extensively to contemporary forms of religion. There is still a tendency to treat religion as if it were not, in fact, a cultural process. In other words, there is a reluctance to recognize that doctrinal production occurs in multiple interpretive sites, and as such, the meanings and lived practices of religion may be relatively independent of official church discourses or of the meanings imputed to them by distant observers.

The privileging of content or representation (and especially of official symbolic texts/discourses) over how that same symbolic content is understood in daily practices mirrors a broader tension in cultural studies between analyses of texts or symbolic codes themselves (e.g., Barthes, 1972; Baudrillard, 1988) and approaches that seek to understand how individuals and groups use such cultural schemas in everyday life. It also reflects a bias in sociology toward a structural, institutional approach to the production of ideology that underplays the relative autonomy and cultural agency of ordinary people. Thus, for example, in the case of the Catholic Church, the church hierarchy is seen as the producer of ideology, whereas the laity are seen as "more acted on than they are actors" (Burns, 1992, p. 29). Such top-down approaches to ideological production understate the ways in which people actively construct meaning in their everyday practices and how these new or reinterpreted cultural schemas may foster social change.

This article offers a perspective on cultural production that emphasizes the communally reflexive nature of interpretive activity. In doing so, I critique Bourdieu's analysis of religious production and specifically his representation of contemporary Catholicism. Notwithstanding the many insights Bourdieu provides for the understanding of social life, his analysis of religion is underpinned by a categorical, top-down model of cultural production, and one that

rests on and is reproduced by, what he calls, *collective misrecognition* (e.g., Bourdieu, 1998, p. 95). I argue that although misrecognition may indeed be essential to the practical mastery of daily life (Calhoun, 2000, p. 711), the “game” of religion/Catholicism is not as mechanistic as Bourdieu suggested. The discontinuities within the objective tradition and the interpretive diversity of Catholicism in everyday life point to how allegedly taken for granted or “doxic” practices may, in fact, disrupt collective misrecognition. Greater awareness of the subjective ways in which misrecognition is collectively subverted illuminates a more culturally driven analysis of institutional processes. In this view, reinterpreted scripts and cognitive schemas can play a significant role, independent of objective structural conditions (e.g., the hierarchical authority structure of the church) but not unrelated to them, in effecting social action, institutional reproduction, and change.

Specifically, this article shows how the doctrinal autonomy of American Catholics allows them to reinterpret or collectively recognize the official discourse of the church hierarchy excluding women from being priests. They do so in ways that advance alternative interpretations favoring a more egalitarian church. Interpretive autonomy is grounded in the Catholic tradition, or what might be called the Catholic habitus, and, intertwined with Catholics’ prereflexive immersion in the lived tradition, is reflexively used by them both to maintain the vibrancy of the tradition and expand the possibilities for institutional change.

Symbolic Production and Collective Misrecognition

Bourdieu saw the process of collective misrecognition as key to maintaining social relations. Based on his early study of Algerian society, Bourdieu (1962) has argued that gift exchange, for example, is a negotiated social practice whose rules are grounded in a shared implicit understanding of the meanings conveyed by giving and receiving (pp. 103-107). Although gift exchange can foster solidarity among equals, more interesting for Bourdieu is the way in which such exchange maintains a particular set of hierarchical social relations.

The successful reproduction of inequality is predicated on the fact that, as Bourdieu (1998) has argued, “practices always have double truths, which are difficult to hold together” (p. 95). Hence, a gift exchange could simply (or objectively) be a disinterested gift exchange or it could be an act of credit. This ambiguity enables relationships to continue over time. Consequently, it is critical that the logic underlying the gift exchange relation not be exposed because to do so would precipitate a breakdown in communal cohesiveness. An explication of what the gift “really” is would violate the terms of the relationship and the logic of honor (or exploitation) governing it. There is thus necessarily a taboo against making things explicit, a silent collusion between the participants about the “truth” of the exchange (p. 96).

The continuing viability of social relations is made possible, according to Bourdieu (1998), through self-deception or self-mystification. This self-deception is not an idiosyncratic, psychological state but is socially institutionalized. It is “sustained by a collective *self-deception*, a veritable *collective misrecognition* inscribed in objective structures (the logic of honor which governs all exchanges—of words, of women, of murders etc.) and in mental structures, excluding the possibility of thinking or acting otherwise” (p. 95).

Like gift exchange, religion is a symbolic system that is simultaneously “structured and structuring” (Bourdieu, 1991a, p. 2). Bourdieu (1991a) saw religion as having its own relatively autonomous field, and he emphasized the fluidity and dynamism of what composes its structure and content. He stressed the plurality of meanings in and functions of religion and emphasized the importance of its contextual understanding (p. 19). Bourdieu argued for a relational analysis of the religious, as of other fields. He observed that what passes for religious beliefs and practices in any given context

can be quite different from the original content of the message and it can be completely understood only in reference to the complete structure of the relations of production, reproduction, circulation, and appropriation of the message and to the history of this structure. (p. 18)

But despite this deep sensitivity to the relational dynamism of religion, Bourdieu nevertheless embraced a categorical view of the production of religious capital. He saw the interpretive process in strongly dichotomous terms, as one between “producers” (specialists) and “consumers” (laity). In Bourdieu’s framework, “religious *specialists*,” or church officials, are the “exclusive holders of the specific competence necessary for the production and reproduction of a *deliberately organized corpus* of secret (and therefore rare) knowledge,” and he contrasted these specialists with the laity who are objectively “dispossessed of *religious capital*” (1991a, p. 9). For Bourdieu, the authentic religious producers are the official institutional specialists who “consciously” reinterpret religion, as opposed to the “dispossessed” consumers/laity, who can merely “demand” but not “supply” religious meanings and goods.

Bourdieu’s hierarchical distinction between religious specialists and the dispossessed laity is a tightly structured model of structuring that seems more foreclosed than one might expect from Bourdieu’s general emphasis on the relational nature of cultural production. The clarity of the boundaries of Bourdieu’s categories derives from his economistic approach to religious production. Bourdieu (1991a) argued that

religious capital depends, at a given moment in time, on the state of the structure of objective relations between religious demand (i.e., the religious interests of various groups or classes of laity) and religious supply (i.e., religious services,

whether orthodox or heretical) that the various claimants are brought to produce. (p. 22)

In Bourdieu's (1991a) religious field, laypeople are confined to the position of consumers of religious goods and services, cultural commodities that are produced by either priests or, at times, prophets (p. 23). In short, "the relationship of seller to buyer" is the "objective truth of any relationship between religious specialists and laypeople" (p. 25). Thus, in the market for religious goods, the laity are "consumers endowed with the minimum religious competence (religious habitus) necessary to demonstrate the specific need for [the church's] products" (pp. 23-24). The superiority in the competence of specialists over laity is further underscored by Bourdieu's explication of the laity's "practical mastery" of religious capital deriving from a "prereflexive" mode in contrast to the "knowledgeable mastery" deliberately and systematically achieved by institutionally mandated specialists (p. 10).

For Bourdieu (1998), the relevance of the religious enterprise is equated with and reduced to its objective economic worth. He argued, for example, that to measure the church's influence one should conduct a "census of positions whose *raison d'être* is the Church's existence and Christian belief," an accounting that would include all those who directly or indirectly rely on the church to make a living (p. 125). Using this method, according to Bourdieu, "everything seems to indicate that we are moving toward a *Church without a faithful* whose strength . . . rests on the ensemble of posts or jobs it holds" (p. 125). In this logic, it is " 'Catholic' jobs which are the primary condition of [the church's] perpetuation" (p. 126) and not the evidence demonstrating that many people continue to invest in the tradition and find relevant meanings that are quite independent in many cases of the "religious capital" produced by church officials.

Euphemization

The inequality between religious specialists and the dispossessed laity is maintained by the ability of church officials to make the laity "misrecognize the arbitrariness" of the church hierarchy's power. The laity, moreover, recognize the legitimacy of their dispossession "from the mere fact that they misrecognize it as such" (Bourdieu, 1991a, p. 9). As Bourdieu argued, much of the institutional apparatus and discourse of the church is structured to convince the laity that they need special qualifications or special grace to allow them access to the religious capital monopolized by church officials. Bourdieu incisively pointed out that the "word games" that accompany church practices are an integral part of the church's symbolic economy (1991a, p. 9; 1998, p. 114). Church officials use language that inoculates the church from acknowledgment of the "real" truth of the logic of its practices. As such, "religious institutions work perma-

nently, both practically and symbolically, to euphemize social relations, including relations of exploitation" (1998, p. 116).

Bourdieu (1998) presented excerpts from statements by French bishops to illustrate their euphemistic language. He pointed, for example, to the French bishops' denial of the church's economic interests, as in statements such as "we are not societies, uh . . . quite like the others: we produce nothing and we sell nothing [laughter], right?" (p. 114).¹ Bourdieu argued that these negations should not be seen as duplicitous or hypocritical but as a necessary strategy assuring the "coexistence of opposites" insofar as the church as an institution caters to a religious faithful who are simultaneously, in economic terms, its clientele (p. 121). In general, therefore, the "religious game" demands that laypeople misrecognize and tacitly accept the denials and double-truths articulated by church officials (p. 113).

The Catholic Priesthood and Symbolic Violence

The euphemization that Bourdieu saw as central to masking the inequality in social relations is well illustrated by the Vatican's discourse on women's exclusion from the priesthood. In recent times, there has been public controversy in the church over the issue of women's ordination. The Vatican rejects the idea of women priests and bases its opposition primarily in the fact that because Christ did not choose women as apostles, this demonstrated his will and intention to exclude women from the priesthood. Vatican arguments maintain that because the institutional blueprint that was configured by Christ's example (in not choosing women apostles) is beyond its interpretive authority, it is prevented from ordaining women even if it wanted to do so (Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith [CDF], 1977, pp. 519, 521).

In the Vatican's construction, although it does not have authority to change the church's teaching on women priests, it does have the authority to demand Catholics' adherence to its teaching on the issue. As reaffirmed by Pope John Paul II (1994), "I declare that the church has no authority whatsoever to confer priestly ordination on women and that this judgment is to be definitively held by all the church's faithful" (p. 51). The Vatican thus simultaneously denies and asserts its authority. This is one of the double truths that inhere in its practices. Although maintaining that its interpretive autonomy is constrained by scripture and tradition, the church hierarchy nonetheless finds legitimacy within those constraints to assert the primacy of its own interpretive power and the authority to demarcate what is mutable and immutable in the Catholic doctrinal tradition.

At the same time as church officials mask the Vatican's autonomous role in maintaining women's inequality in the church, they also, following Bourdieu's language, mask the inequality that they perpetuate by transfiguring it into something else. Central to this process of mystification is the church hierar-

chy's euphemization of what the priesthood "really" is. The Vatican (CDF, 1995) argued that the priesthood

is a service and not a position of privilege or human power over others. Whoever, man or woman, conceives of the priesthood in terms of personal affirmation, as a goal or point of departure in a career of human success, is profoundly mistaken, for the true meaning of Christian priesthood . . . can only be found in the sacrifice of one's own being in union with Christ, in service of the brethren. (p. 404)

The church hierarchy's conceptualization of the priesthood as being constituted by an economy of sacrifice, what Bourdieu (1998, p. 112) called the "economy of the offering," allows church officials to present themselves as being disinterested in privilege and power. In this view, to be a priest, bishop, cardinal, or pope is to answer the call of a vocation; it is not the pursuit of a career but the sacrificing of an (alternative) career. But although the priesthood is posited as a disinterested service whose hierarchical structure is "totally ordered" to "the holiness of the faithful" (John Paul II, 1994, p. 51), its exclusion of women works both symbolically and in practice to express and reproduce the church's male, hierarchical authority structure.

Church officials reject the claim, however, that the ban on women priests is a form of inequality or discrimination. Its gender reasoning once again highlights "the coexistence of opposites" that characterizes the church's practices. On one hand, the Vatican emphasizes the equality of men and women and in various public statements has condemned the "sin of sexism" (John Paul II, 1995, p. 140). The pope affirmed women's presence in economics and politics as making an "indispensable contribution" to the growth of a more humane culture (John Paul II, 1995, p. 139). At the same time, women are prohibited from making a contribution to the church as priests. The Vatican does not see this as an institutional contradiction. The apparent contradiction gets resolved, the Vatican argued, by understanding the distinct "sacramental economy" of the church. In this framing,

it must not be forgotten that the priesthood does not form part of the rights of the individual, but stems from the economy of the mystery of Christ and the church. The priestly office cannot become the goal of social advancement . . . it is of another order. (CDF, 1977, p. 523)

In this line of reasoning, because the priesthood is of a different order, the social expectations that apply in other domains are irrelevant. In the sacramental economy, the notion of gender role equality is misguided, and the rationale for excluding women from being priests is, according to the Vatican, not to be seen as an arbitrary institutional imposition. The Vatican's gender reasoning is intertwined with its understanding of priesthood, and both are grounded in a symbolic economy whose rules of signification and interpretation allow the

Vatican to deny that it discriminates against women and deny the possibility of a more egalitarian church. In sum, official church discourse on women's ordination supports Bourdieu's analysis of the logic of repression, contradiction, and denial that characterizes the economy of symbolic goods. Recourse to euphemization enables the church hierarchy to maintain double truths that seek to reproduce both its power as the primary interpreter of the Catholic tradition and the exclusivity of a male, hierarchical structure.

The Laity and Collective Recognition

But just because church officials mask the logic underlying official church practices, this does not necessarily mean that the laity misrecognize the truth behind the church hierarchy's stance on a given issue. The process of misrecognition is less stable than Bourdieu assumed. It is open to disruption, in part because of the discontinuities contained within a given cultural or institutional habitus. Bourdieu, in fact, recognized this possibility. In his recent work (1998), he stated,

Because the economy of symbolic goods is based on belief, the principle of its reproduction or crisis is found in the reproduction or crisis of belief. . . . But the rupture cannot result from a simple awakening of consciousness; the transformation of dispositions cannot occur without a prior or concomitant transformation of the objective structures of which they are the product and which they can survive. (p. 122)²

Bourdieu, however, did not apply this insight in his analysis of the symbolic economy. He did not acknowledge, for example, how a disposition toward collective recognition might become inscribed into objective structures and how, in turn, such dispositions may disrupt the process of collective misrecognition that he saw as being so critical to maintaining the status quo.

In the case of Catholicism, the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965) can be seen as an instance of partial transformation in the church's structure and doxa. It set in place changes that were both in continuity with and major departures from the church's historical practices (cf. O'Malley, 1989). Of particular relevance to the focus of this article, Vatican II can be seen as instigating (or reinstigating) a decentering of interpretive authority in the church (see Dillon, 1999, pp. 45-53; Seidler & Meyer, 1989). Building on the church's longstanding theological affirmation of the coupling of "faith and reason," Vatican II underscored the importance of doctrinal and institutional reflexivity to the reproduction of Catholicism. It also emphasized respect for communal agency and interpretive equality within the church in contrast to the privileging of the unilateral authority of church officials. The church articulated the obligation of all Catholics (clerical and lay) to take an informed and reasoned responsibility for the identity and direction of the church and to recognize,

rather than misrecognize, the logic underlying the inegalitarian practices of the church (and of other institutions). It rejected the “split consciousness” (Bourdieu, 1998, p. 97) that reproduces tacit collusion and instead emphasized the importance of opening up and questioning the logic underlying church practices.

The objective doctrinal and institutional changes achieved at Vatican II contributed to a transformation in Catholics’ understanding of Catholicism and of its possibilities (cf. D’Antonio, Davidson, Hoge, & Wallace, 1989; Greeley, 1985; Seidler & Meyer, 1989). One effect of Vatican II was to blur the distinction that Bourdieu (1991a, p. 10) invoked between the laity’s prereflexive practical mastery and the knowledgeable mastery of specialists in the production of religious capital. Evidence for this can be variously found in Catholics’ attitudinal and behavioral rejection of official church teaching on select matters that they perceive as being relatively peripheral to their religious identity (e.g., birth control).

It is also apparent in the emergence of a range of prochange movements within the church focused on eliminating institutional barriers (e.g., the ban on women’s ordination) that prevent the church from being as inclusive as its doctrine may allow. One such group is the Women’s Ordination Conference (WOC), an American-based, international, grassroots organization that, since its founding in 1975, has argued for the ordination of women in the Catholic Church. Although the Vatican maintains that the church’s sacramental-sign economy is derived from the “mystery of Christ,” and as such is immutable and beyond its control, WOC members, and the majority of American and European Catholics, take a different view.

Doctrinal Reflexivity in Practice

WOC members’ contestation and reinterpretation of official church doctrine suggests a more complex relation between euphemization and misrecognition than is argued by Bourdieu. As Catholics who choose to stay within the church, WOC members assume the authority to reinterpret Catholic theology rather than either colluding in accepting the givenness of official logic or abandoning the church as hopelessly patriarchal. They take core doctrinal tenets and use them to argue for interpretations that challenge those presented by church officials. Whereas official church arguments defend the exclusivity of a male-only priesthood by pointing to the single act of Jesus in choosing only men as apostles, WOC members focus on the social dimensions and relational meanings of Christ’s life as a whole. For them, as this section will illustrate, accounts of Christ’s life—as affirmed in liturgical rituals of Catholic socialization—lead to an alternative theological interpretation that illuminates an inclusive rather than a discriminatory Jesus.

The findings presented here are based on narratives derived from responses to open-ended questions from a structured, self-administered questionnaire I sent to a representative random sample of ordinary WOC members ($N = 214$; for further details, see Dillon, 1999, pp. 168-169; 262-263). The vast majority of the respondents (88%) used doctrinal/theological reasoning in arguing against the Vatican's position on ordination. Many of these linked their view favoring women priests to the activism personified by Christ on behalf of equality and justice. The following were expressed by these WOC respondents:

Basically I experience Jesus in the New Testament as being with the causes—standing with all who are on the journey for truth. I believe in equality and justice and I hope for the dawning of the day when both women and married priests experience fullness within Catholicism.

To me, being a Catholic means to participate in the Church established by Jesus. Jesus always seemed to espouse the dignity of humankind. To realize that dignity, all people need to be afforded the opportunity to follow their calling, to utilize their individual gifts and talents given to them by their creator. To deny that dignity to half of humankind does not fulfill the example set by Jesus to be Catholic.

If we take to heart Jesus's words about equality, we must be willing to look at institutions and our individual lives and be willing to *live* accordingly.

Other WOC members highlighted the universalism as opposed to the maleness of Christ's humanity to challenge the male iconic significance that is attached to Jesus in official church statements. In arguing for change, these respondents pointed to the symbolic-theological implications that flow from the church hierarchy's exclusion of women from the sacramental imaging of Christ:

If the most important thing about Christ is maleness, are women saved? The Vatican's Christology is warmed-over misogynistic-androcentric daydreaming.

If Christianity teaches that all are redeemed in Jesus Christ then it is a contradiction to exclude women in the full ministry. It is a denial of redemption. Either Jesus is savior of all or what we believe is false.

Many other WOC members invoked scriptural and/or Vatican II references to equality. As argued by these respondents, a church that claims to be universal and inclusive of all humanity undermines its foundational ethics by institutionalizing what respondents regard as arbitrary, gender-based boundaries of exclusion. Some interviewees explicitly framed women's ordination as an issue of institutional credibility for a church grounded in Christ-embodied ethics of justice and equality. These respondents emphasized that current church practices excluding women from the priesthood were a deviation from the redemptive narrative of Christ's life and from the ethics that are central to the church's identity. One middle-aged man summarized the views of many of his WOC peers when he stated,

Equality, fairness, even-handedness—all are values that the Catholic Church has and does espouse. These are good mature values—human, humane, and person-enhancing. Preaching equality and practicing it in actuality *must* go together, or else it's just words.

Other WOC participants variously echoed this stance, stating the following:

Catholicism is important to me because it has provided the framework in which I could exercise my belief in God and in the life and work of Jesus. I need the Church to show the way to live justly. I wish it would begin with following more closely the message of Jesus.

We have to accord human rights and equality to all if we are truly Christian. Patriarchy, domination of any one, discrimination of all kinds are all irreconcilable with Christianity. If Catholics are truly followers of Christ, we can't do it.

In addition to the various doctrinal arguments offered in favor of women priests, many WOC respondents (33%) also explicitly framed women's exclusion from ordination as a manifestation of institutional power. These Catholics challenged the structural and interpretive authority assumed by the church hierarchy in interpreting Catholic doctrine. For them, the Vatican's stance on ordination is understood as the product of a historically and politically situated church hierarchy seeking to reproduce the exclusivity of the priesthood. One woman stated,

To be a Catholic in full participation is to be a *man* today. Women are absent in image of God, in representation of priesthood, and from power—all going back to historical development.

Another argued,

I believe the real issue is power—priests, bishops, cardinals, and Pope John Paul. The growing fear of women began after Vatican II when women became knowledgeable about the Council documents, and some priests had not even read them, much less taught them.

Discussion

The data presented above highlight the fact that Catholics challenge the euphemization of church officials in defending women's exclusion from the priesthood. WOC members reject the double reasoning of the church hierarchy and present an alternative interpretation of the meanings that they see inscribed in Catholic theology. As the above quotations illustrated, Catholics who argue for women's ordination demonstrate a remarkable mastery of the tradition derived from both their prereflexive immersion in and reflexive engagement with doctrine. Contrary to Bourdieu's clear-cut distinction between the practical mastery of the laity and the knowledgeable mastery of

church specialists/officials, in practice, doctrinal/symbolic mastery is more diffuse. Although lay Catholics do not have the institutional legitimacy of formal authority that is conferred on church officials, many nonetheless use doctrine, the specialized language of the church, to counterargue against the reasoning employed by church officials. In short, the pope and the bishops do not have a monopoly on the church's symbolic resources; the laity, too, have access to doctrinal knowledge and the fund of Catholic capital.

Catholics' reflexive use of doctrine enables them to see through the power-based, this-worldly interests of the church hierarchy and not to misrecognize but to recognize the church's teaching on ordination as an arbitrary monopolization of power. It is, moreover, participation in the Catholic tradition (*habitus*) that contributes to empowering Catholics to challenge the doctrines and practices put forward by the church hierarchy. Their immersion in the routines, narratives, and dispositions of Catholicism provides Catholics with the interpretive authority and symbolic resources to make official church teaching a site of what Steven Seidman (1994) would call "contested knowledge."

Doctrinal Knowledge and Strategic Postmodernism

It is the appropriation of the freedom to contest doctrinal (and other) knowledge that perhaps best exemplifies the impact of a late- or postmodern sensibility on religion. In today's culture of identity and lifestyle choices (cf. Giddens, 1991), people who choose to remain actively involved in a religious tradition do so in terms that make reasonable sense to them. They use their everyday, lived knowledge of Catholicism to determine what truths from the multifaceted tradition are relevant to their particular life contexts. The inconsistencies between doctrine and practices that Catholics perceive in the church push them to challenge the narrative that is offered as the rationale for maintaining inequality. Their firsthand knowledge of the church supports their efforts to reconstruct rather than reproduce the church's inegalitarian structures. For these Catholics, therefore, involvement in religion is not the outcome of a quest for an "indubitably supreme authority" as has been argued by Bauman (1997, p. 184) with respect to "fundamentalists." It derives rather from their authoritative use of doctrine to make sense of everyday life and to advance the realization of modernity's promise (cf. Giddens, 1991) of equality, justice, and participation.³

If postmodernity is, as Craig Calhoun suggested (1995, p. 108), "the era of the sign," it might seem that the symbolic manipulation and reinterpretation engaged in by members of the WOC and by other Catholics typify them as postmodern. In producing new "signs" or new interpretations, respondents destabilize the universalizing, grand narrative (cf. Lyotard, 1984) of Catholic

identity promulgated in official church teaching. The interpretive work conducted by these Catholics highlights a broader pattern in American society whereby, as Steven Seidman (1994) observed, foundational claims (to God, to history, etc.) lack public authority and moral credibility because they are now seen as “masking particular interests” (p. 191). Thus, as demonstrated here, WOC members uncover alternative doctrinal interpretations and highlight the power-based implications of the official discourse. The new interpretations put forward by these Catholics, however, derive their potential persuasiveness in large part from the fact that they maintain continuity with the Catholic doctrinal tradition.

Whereas the postmodern ethos rejects universalizing arguments and calls for the construction of new interpretive stances derived from an array of fragmented and contradictory sources (cf. Rosenau, 1992, pp. 6-8), Catholics who advocate change carve an emancipatory framework from within Catholicism. They take seriously the tradition’s emphasis on the coupling of faith and reason and seek to make the church’s institutional practices meaningful and reasonable in light of contemporary values (e.g., equality, justice). Their reflexive critique of the Catholic tradition enables them to remain Catholic without abandoning their quest for pluralism and equality. Accordingly, their emancipatory project may be more accurately thought of as representing a strategic postmodernism. As elaborated by Charles Lemert (1997), strategic postmodernism is more cautious than a radical postmodernism because rather than rejecting modernity, it is “engaged in the process of rewriting the history of modernity” (p. 47). The Catholics discussed here are recovering from the tradition of the doctrinal resources that enable them to reconstruct a more egalitarian, participative, and just church.

The game of Catholicism, therefore, is more complicated than might be assumed from Bourdieu’s account of the production of religious capital. Depending on the issue and the context, there are times when the “unnameable” is made explicit by those whom Bourdieu would expect should remain silent. Thus, WOC members and other Catholics reject the symbolic violence that church officials perpetuate in excluding women from ordination. They refuse to perceive the church hierarchy’s reasoning through the categories of perception that are encouraged by their objectively subordinate position relative to the hierarchy. Rather than colluding in collective misrecognition, they instead unveil the logic they believe church officials are masking.

Cultural Contestation and Social Cohesiveness

As it is played out in everyday life, Catholics’ collective recognition of the reasoning of church officials does not threaten the cohesiveness or viability of the Catholic community. One of Bourdieu’s concerns is with how solidarity is

maintained in the face of conflict and relational struggles (cf. Swartz, 1997, p. 48). But although Bourdieu emphasized the relationality that is involved in social reproduction, he also showed a somewhat mechanistic and narrow view of how social solidarity is reproduced. In the context of gift exchange, Bourdieu (1998) argued that failure to abide by the taboo of making things explicit would “destroy the exchange” (p. 96), whereas in institutional processes more generally, “rendering explicit brings about a destructive alteration” (p. 113).

Institutional and cultural processes, however, are more resilient and open ended than Bourdieu assumed. Everyday life is replete with instances in which people negotiate multiple, often conflicting, identities (Calhoun, 1995; De Certeau, 1984) without undermining the flow of social relationships. One of the underlying reasons for this is that the process of collective recognition/misrecognition is never total but is partial and selective (see also Calhoun, 2000, p. 710). In the case of this study’s Catholics, we see a reflexive critique of how church practices deviate from Christ-derived ethics of equality. We do not see a critique that extends to explicit questioning of the credibility of belief in Christ or indeed to a questioning of the relevance of the church’s tradition *per se*. These are people for whom the Catholic habitus is an objective and subjectively experienced sociocultural given. Collective recognition, therefore, is invariably limited, and, as Bourdieu has emphasized, tacit misrecognition facilitates the relative smoothness of daily routines and sustains their plausibility (see also Berger & Luckmann, 1966). Similarly, I am not suggesting that all Catholics take on the reflexive doctrinal disposition illustrated here. Many Catholics, no doubt, remain Catholic because they misrecognize various aspects of church teaching that challenge some of their own political values and daily practices.

But precisely because collective misrecognition is so effective in daily life, it is important to acknowledge that instances of collective recognition do not disrupt communal solidarity. The interrogation and destabilization of important cultural symbols do not necessarily discredit the larger tradition from which those symbols derive (but see Schwartz, 1996, for a contrary perspective). As the research reported here shows, the disposition to inquire into the Catholic tradition and recover new meanings from within it simultaneously revitalizes the tradition by demonstrating the possibilities for its contemporary relevance.

Cultural meanings are actively produced by ordinary people as part of their everyday reality and are not confined to, or determined by, cultural specialists. In this view, religious practices, similar to other everyday practices, have to be understood not simply in terms of their origins or “what produces them” (De Certeau, 1984, p. 58) but also in terms of the cultural resources they offer different people in everyday life (cf. Denzin, 1996, p. xvi). Contrary to the dichotomy postulated by Bourdieu between producers and consumers, the interpretation of doctrine should be seen as religious/ideological production in its own right. As an interpretive process, cultural production is diffuse and differentiated and allows for a greater range of practical possibilities than that determin-

istically connoted by outcomes of either reproduction or destruction of social relations.

As Bourdieu (1991b) argued, symbolic power does not derive from words alone but from “belief in the legitimacy of words and of those who utter them” (p. 170). In the Catholic Church, many lay Catholics contest both the structural and the substantive legitimacy of the church hierarchy to have the last word on, for example, women’s ordination. Yet, because Bourdieu embraced a hierarchical model of religious authority, he failed to recognize how the laity can exert symbolic power as autonomous religious producers through their reflexive engagement with the church’s tradition. From a structural perspective, therefore, the laity contribute to the structuring of the culture of Catholicism and to its objective fund of religious capital. It is for this reason, in part, that Catholicism continues to have authority and meaning for the majority of Catholics who nonetheless reject the interpretive authority of church officials (cf. Dillon, 1999).

Because participation in a religious tradition is a voluntary and interpretive activity, believers enjoy an autonomy of meaning construction that is beyond the control of church officials. Models of the religious-symbolic economy that favor a categorical division between producers and consumers (e.g., Bourdieu, 1991a; Finke & Stark, 1992) and/or that focus on top-down structural determinants of ideological/doctrinal production (e.g., Burns, 1992) do not accommodate the fact that there are multiple micro producers and multiple sites of doctrinal production. In the perspective advanced in this article, the church is not just an objective structure, but it is also a “community of interpretation” (Schussler Fiorenza, 1992) wherein interpretive authority is diffuse. Thus, following Michel Foucault (1978, pp. 93-96), power is all around rather than located in one site of religious production (e.g., the Vatican). Accordingly, what gets accepted as credible doxa, and who has the authority to define doctrine, is much more open to variation than is the case in contexts wherein interpretive authority is unilateral and noncontestable.

Conclusion

Bourdieu is seen by some sociologists (e.g., Lash, 1989, pp. 250-254) as a theorist who opens up the understanding of postmodern culture due to his emphasis on the blurring of boundaries and the indeterminacy of identity (apparent, according to Lash, in *Homo Academicus*). This, however, is not the framework evident in Bourdieu’s analysis of religion. Although Vatican II, as I have argued, blurred the boundaries of interpretive authority in the Catholic Church and opened up the content of Catholic identity, Bourdieu’s analysis of Catholicism operates with a mechanistic, pre-Vatican II categorical model in which church officials as producers supply religious meaning to a dispossessed laity. What is ultimately surprising about Bourdieu’s analysis of religion is his inattention to its interpretive pluralism and to the fact that meaning is uncer-

tain because, as De Certeau (1997, p. 129) has pointed out, “common signifiers are referred to and used quite differently” (see also Hall, 1973). Although Bourdieu sees religion as a symbolic system, he ignores the diversity of meanings people inject into religious discourses, experiences, and participation. Bourdieu’s perspective on religion thus hovers rather close to the French structuralism he rejected precisely because of its tendency to privilege the observer’s over the subjects’ eyes (cf. Fowler, 1997, pp. 2-3).

Although Bourdieu’s accentuation of the economic logic underlying church practices is not without merit, the totalizing, economistic frame he clamped on religious production offers a one-sided and monolithic model of the religious symbolic economy, a view that contrasts with his more dynamic representation (e.g., *Distinction*) of lifestyle practices more generally. One of Bourdieu’s many contributions has been to demonstrate the cultural differentiation within class groups, for example, and show how this differentiation reproduces specific lifestyles and cultural habits. What is absent from Bourdieu’s analysis of the religious economy is a similar sensitivity to the differentiated ways in which social contexts mediate and affect religious production. This omission, in turn, is exacerbated by Bourdieu’s elitist view of religious capital as being the prerogative of religious specialists/church officials. Importantly, Bourdieu’s structural perspective alerts us to how everyday mechanisms (e.g., discursive styles) reproduce institutional and cultural inequalities. But in emphasizing reproduction, Bourdieu glossed over the possibilities for cultural contestation and the new meanings and new institutional practices that may emerge in the production process. Models of production that do not take account of reproduction may seem sociologically naïve. But models of reproduction that ignore the subjective meanings that get injected into specific discourses and practices risk reifying and rigidifying the practices they seek to explain. Although a focus on social reproduction is necessary to illuminate historical and institutional continuities, the meaning production process itself should be recognized for its everyday ambiguities and possibilities.

Notes

1. The euphemization of the church’s institutional practices is not a phenomenon confined to France whose long history of anticlericalism might be seen as a cultural factor necessitating such language. A similar use of negation characterizes bishops’ public discourse in societies as culturally diverse as Ireland and America (see, for example, Dillon, 1993, pp. 95-96).

2. In my reading, the position advanced by Bourdieu (1981) here indicates a view that is much more open to institutional change than that in his garment metaphor: “Objectified, institutional history only becomes enacted and active if . . . like a garment or a house, [it] finds someone who finds an interest in it, feels sufficiently at home in it to take it on” (p. 309). What is left unsaid in this passage is that social actors can refash-

ion an institution's identity. Institutions, like garments, can be unraveled and resewn; they can be remodeled without being destroyed.

3. Other Catholics similarly contest official church teaching and reinterpret doctrine in ways that show the validity of their particular interpretations of Catholicism. Participants in Dignity, an association of gay and lesbian Catholics, enact a reinterpreted, inclusive Catholicism that validates being, for example, gay and Catholic through a changed Mass liturgy (see Dillon, 1999, pp. 115-163).

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