
Editorial: The Importance of Pierre Bourdieu

I came to Bourdieu late in my academic studies; I heard his name from time to time during my graduate coursework, but his work was never assigned in the classes I took. However, while I was working on my dissertation I ran across a cheap, battered copy of *Language and Symbolic Power* at a used book store and picked it up on a whim. I loved it on my first read, and before long I had picked up several other books and found a way to integrate a number of Bourdieu's ideas into my thesis.

I have come to believe that Bourdieu is as important to the study of religion and society as Marx, Durkheim, and Weber. His work is so important that I introduce Bourdieu to my freshmen every semester in REL 101: Introduction to Religion; I spend a couple weeks discussing his concept of "habitus," his critique of the idea of meritocracy, and—despite the difficulty of Bourdieu's writings—I even assign one of his essays on initiation rituals ("Rites of Institution," collected in *Language and Symbolic Power*).

For these reasons I am excited to present this special issue of the *Bulletin* focusing on Pierre Bourdieu and his usefulness for the study of religion. The first two essays discuss theoretical issues: Sean McCloud considers how Bourdieu can account for social transformation despite his determinism, and Lene Kühle defends and clarifies Bourdieu's theory of a "religious field." The next three essays, by Rebekka King, Kevin Wanner, and Alex Gottesman, put Bourdieu's theories to work in a number of contexts and traditions: modern agnostic and atheist Christian com-

munities, the Protestant Reformation, and ancient Greco-Roman religious traditions. In the penultimate essay, Otto Maduro recounts his experiences teaching Bourdieu at the graduate level, considering both pedagogical challenges and rewards. This group of essays is concluded with Jody Caldwell's bibliography of Bourdieu's work and commentaries on his work—focusing on those relevant for religious studies—and works that apply Bourdieu's theories in religious studies. (For interested readers, I would like to point out that an interview with Terry Rey about his book *Bourdieu on Religion: Imposing Faith and Legitimacy* appeared on the *Bulletin* blog in the fall of 2010. It can be found if you search for "Bourdieu" or "Rey" at religionbulletin.org; the direct link is <http://www.equinoxjournals.com/blog/2010/09/sociology-as-a-martial-art-an-interview-with-terry-rey/>)

This issue concludes with the most recent interview to appear at the *Bulletin* blog—last fall I interviewed Tim Murphy about his most recent book, *The Politics of Spirit: Phenomenology, Genealogy, Religion* (State University of New York Press, 2010). This is what you're missing if you're not already subscribed to our blog's RSS feed or if you haven't liked us on Facebook! Look us up at religionbulletin.org or <http://www.facebook.com/religionbulletin> so you don't miss this content when it first appears.

Craig Martin
Co-Editor