Enforcing priesthood. The struggle for the monopolisation of religious goods and the construction of the Christian religious field

Drawing on a Bourdieusian framework, this paper aims to sketch out the main strategies by which the ‘ecclesiastical party’ of successive bishops from the mid-second to the late third century CE managed to establish itself as mainline, to make its normative claims effective, and to see off the major forms of religious competition, thereby constructing the Christian religious field of the imperial era. To accomplish all this, what we might call the bishop’s viewpoint had to be brought to prevail over that of specialists endowed with different types of religious capital. Among these, three categories of religious providers were particularly competitive: the ‘charismatics’, the ‘great laymen’ and those who viewed themselves as ‘enlightened’, usually known as Gnostics.

1. Ignatius of Antioch as nomothète

1.1. The mantra: ‘Do nothing without the bishop’

At some point in the second quarter of the 2nd century CE,¹ the Jesus-follower Ignatius, bishop of Antioch, sought to counter what he saw as the administrative and liturgical disorder of certain Christian groups in which ecclesiastical order was virtually non-existent. To this end, he writes to the Magnesians as follows:

Since, then, I have observed [emphasis mine], by the eyes of faith, your entire congregation through those I have already mentioned, and loved it, I urge you to hasten to do all things in the harmony of God (ἐν ὁμονοίᾳ θεοῦ σπουδάζετε πάντα πράσσειν), with the bishop presiding in the place of God and the presbyters in the place of the council of the apostles, and the deacons, who are especially dear to me, entrusted with the ministry of Jesus Christ [...].

Magn. 6.1.²

And to the Smyrneans:

¹ On this ‘new dating’ to Hadrian’s reign, see for example Brent (2006, 318). For a status quaestionis on both authenticity and dating, see Brent (2007, 95–158).
² I use the English translation of Ehrman (2003). All other citations from Ignatius’ letters are from this version.
Let no one do anything involving the church without the bishop (Μηδεὶς χωρὶς ἐπισκόπου τι πρασεῖτω τῶν ἁγικότων εἰς τὴν ἐκκλησίαν). Let that Eucharist be considered valid that occurs under the bishop or the one to whom he entrusts it. Let the congregation be wherever the bishop appears; just as wherever Jesus Christ is, there also is the universal church. It is not permitted either to baptize or to hold an feast without the bishop (Οὐκ ἔσον ἐστὶν χωρὶς ἐπισκόπου ὁ ὃς βαπτίζειν ὁ ὃς ἀγάπην ποιεῖν). But whatever he approves is acceptable to God, so that everything you do should be secure and valid.

Smyrn. 8:1; transl. slightly modified.

These are not descriptive texts, since they do not reproduce an existent historical-empirical reality. They point rather to the ought-to-be of the world to come, which is not satisfied by being uttered, but rather strives to become the medium through which the present world is at once perceived and valued (Squarcini 2012, 22). These openly prescriptive words help us to grasp how the bishop sought to achieve his dominant position as ruler of the ἐκκλησία essentially “by making the field in which a place could be found for him” (Bourdieu 1996, 76).

Ignatius of Antioch can be considered the ‘legislator’ (Bourdieu 1996, 62: ‘nomothète’) of the Christian religious field as socio-symbolic space whose key term is the slogan χωρὶς τοῦ ἐπισκόπου μηδέν, that is, “nothing without the bishop”. The slogan summarises a collective struggle to transform a hitherto anomic and fluid space, criss-crossed by the efforts of a whole variety of different subjects to manipulate the sacred, into a structured universe of transactions and struggles between objectively related positions. By the same token, the bishop’s presence will bring order and visibility to a confused and blurred socio-religious space: “Wherever the bishop appears, there let the congregation be”; for, as Ignatius puts it, the visible bishop represents the invisible Christ (Magn. 3.2).

This transformative visibility corresponds to the bishop’s status at the pinnacle of a threefold structure of church government (bishop-priests-deacons).³ For his ‘vision’ (cf. ἔθεσα ἡμᾶς) to become the sole legitimate standpoint – the very principle of ‘seeing as Christians’ as it were –, his view of the salvation-game must be diffused throughout the field. Optical metaphors aside, this means that the theocratic-messianic idea, namely that the Jesus-follower submits solely to an immediately apprehensible divine power that overwhelms any human power (Taubes 1987, 5), has now been tempered by the claim that the religious services provided by a single ex officio specialist have a unique value and privilege. The very enjoyment of Christian liberty consists thus in the practical recognition of this primacy implying religious submission to the bishop alone. In other words, the eschatological lordship of Jesus is in the process of being his-

toricised and institutionalised in the primacy of the bishop, while the authority of the apostles can be used to cover the time in between.⁴

1.2. The ‘shamanistic complex’

“Χωρὶς τοῦ ἐπισκόπου μηδὲν ποιεῖτε” is Ignatius’ pastoral mantra (see Philad. 7.2; also Trall. 2.2; Smyrn. 8.19). The claim is that the freedom acquired by the believer in Jesus can only be safeguarded by being transferred to the bishop as both provider of salvation-services and rights-holder:

For when you are subject to the bishop (τῷ ἐπισκόπῳ υποτάσσομεθε) as to Jesus Christ, you appear to me to live not in a human way but according to Jesus Christ, who died for us that you may escape dying by believing in his death. And so—as is already the case—you must not engage in any activity apart from the bishop (Ἀναγκαῖον οὐν ἐστίν, ὠσπερ ποιεῖτε, ἀνευ τοῦ ἐπισκόπου μηδὲν πράσσειν ἰμάς), but be subject also to the presbytery as to the apostles of Jesus Christ, our hope.

Trall. 2.1–2.

The practical motto of the Jesus-like lifestyle is thus “that none may enter here!”, i.e. into the ecclesiastical space of eschatological freedom, without first being subject to the bishop by adhering to his vision of the salvation-game.⁵ Who is the Christian? He who “do[es] [no]thing apart from him” (Magn. 4.1). How does the Christian think? As one with his bishop:

For this reason it is fitting for you to run together in harmony with the mind of the bishop (συντρέχειν τῇ τοῦ ἐπισκόπου γνώμη), which is exactly what you are doing. For your presbytery, which is both worthy of the name and worthy of God, is attuned (συνήμοστα) to the bishop as strings to the lyre. Therefore Jesus Christ is sung in your harmony and symphonic love (ἐν τῇ ὅμοιῳ ὑμῶν καὶ συμφώνῳ ἀγάτῃ). 2. And each of you should join the chorus, that by being symphonic in your harmony, taking up God’s pitch in unison, you may sing in one voice (Καὶ οἱ κατ’ ἄνθρα ἔχο ἐνίσχυς, ἵσα σύμφωνοι ὄντες ἐν ὁμοιοίᾳ, χρώμα θεοῦ λαβόντες ἐν ἐνότητι, ἄπητε ἐν φῶνη μιᾷ) through Jesus Christ to the Father, that he may both hear and recognize you through the things you do well, since you are members of his Son.

Eph. 4.1–2; see also 20.2.

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⁴ The idea of the apostolic succession is absent in Ignatius and first appears in Irenaeus, Haer. 3.3. On the ‘dead end’ of a position such as that taken by Papias of Hierapolis – i.e., a master-disciple transmission of charisma –, see Norelli (2005, 139–153).

⁵ The citation is from Bourdieu (1996, 223).
The imposition of the monopoly of a symbolic power (here: religious authority) depends on the ability of the institution that claims it “to make known to those who are excluded from it the legitimacy of their exclusion” (Bourdieu 1991, 25). The work of transfiguration of the relations of religious production and subordination into euphonious chords of a choral melody helps to conceal – above all from the writer – “the arbitrariness of the monopolization of a power and a competence in principle accessible to anyone” (ibid.).

Bourdieu takes over from Claude Lévi-Strauss what the latter called the ‘shamanistic complex’ (ibid., p. 21). This can be defined as the “quasi magical circulation of powers in the course of which the group produces and projects the symbolic power that will be exercised upon itself and in the terms of which is constituted” (Lévi-Strauss 1963, 179). Applying Bourdieu’s terms to Ignatius’ text, unanimity between religious dominants and dominated is called the harmony (συμφωνία) of the church body, just as the concord (συναρμογή) among the dominants (i.e. the presbyteral college) is attuned to the bishop’s will. The overall effect is to efface the arbitrary character of the accumulation of both material and symbolic resources that is necessary for the construction of asymmetrical religious power. It is this effacement that allows the dominant point of view to establish itself in the dominated vision: “It is necessary, as your practice (ὡσπερ ποιεῖτε), to do nothing without the bishop”; or “it is right for you to run together with the purpose of the bishop, which you indeed do (ὅπερ καὶ ποιεῖτε)”. As ancient epistolography attests, to urge others to do what they are already doing is a diplomatic means of asserting a certain type of demand, one whose legitimacy is accepted by both sides, but whose implementation is uncertain, or at least delicate (Shoedel 1985, 51).

Some recent contributions relieve me of the task of sketching a brief genealogy of monespicy (see e.g. Stewart 2014). Nor do I intend to deal with the struggles within what Ignatius calls the presbytery (πρεσβυτέρων; see Eph. 4.1; Trall. 7.2; 13.2; Philad. 4; 5.2; Smyrn. 8.1), that is, the college of the clergy. I interpret here the inchoate clergy as a body, that is, as a collective agent, ruled by forces of fusion that unify its ranks and synchronise its movements within the competitive space of a broader Christian religious field. Consequently, this very social unit is not scrutinised as a field, that is, a social universe shaped by forces of fission arising from “the interests of the various members of the group [= of

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6 This is the mechanism that the young Bourdieu (1958, 453–458) traced back to the Sartrean concept of bad faith.
7 On ὀμόνοια as the principle of Church Unity, see Brent (2006, 296–308).
8 Schoedel (1985, 51) reports a parallel drawn from a private letter (P.Freib. 39). See also IThess. 4.1, which can hardly be considered a subtext.
the clergy, who may be more or less inclined to accept the common vision [= of the bishop] and more or less capable of imposing their ‘selfish’ point of view” (Bourdieu 1998, 70).

2. The Christian religious field: a brief sketch

2.1. The marketplace of Christian services and religious goods

In Ignatius’ view, the bishop must prevail over other providers of religious goods and services in some way related to the saving figure of Jesus of Nazareth, in order to establish both his own point of view and his specific religious capital within the growing symbolic market of Jesus-followers. As the emergent leader of the clergy – first de facto and then de jure –, the bishop must enforce his power in two different ways. He must first mark out and defend the boundaries of the field as he understands it, and then he must define the functions of the clergy, which involves entering into conflict with other religious agents over the leadership of the ἐκκλησία.

I have chosen to discuss three types of challengers to the emergent power of bishops on account of their significant positions within the Christian religious field. As in the case of the bishop, each of these categories of religious providers disposed of powerful resources in the competition for domination over the field. They are:

1. the charismatics, endowed with ecstatic-prophetic capital;
2. the great laymen, able to deploy ample social and economic capital;
3. the enlightened, claiming ontological capital signalled by ‘true knowledge’ achieved through discipline (hereafter termed ‘gnoseo-ontological’).

Note that my choice of the term ‘enlightened’ here deliberately avoids terms such as Gnostics and Gnosticism, which derive from the discourse of the ancient polemical texts and have subsequently been naturalised by modern scholarship based on standard theological assumptions, which until very recently simply reproduced the agenda of the ancient texts viewed as ‘sources’.

9 See King 2003, and the contribution by Denzey Lewis in this volume (Chapter 3). Bentley Layton has suggested a radical nominalist position, using the term Gnostic only when the author of the text is supposed to apply the label to himself and the group: see Layton (1995, 334–350).
The following passages, read against the background of Ignatius’ governmental project, provide an initial insight into these three different forms of challenge:

The Lord has sent me as a partisan, revealer, and interpreter of this suffering, covenant, and promise. I am compelled to come to understand the knowledge of God whether I want to or not

Maximilla ap. Epiph. haer. 48.13.1.¹⁰

“Believe us, Brother Peter”, they [i.e., the brethren] said, “none among men was so wise as this Marcellus. All the widows who hoped in Christ took their refuge in him; all the orphans were fed by him. Will you know more, brother? All the poor called Marcellus their patron; his house was called the house of the pilgrims and poor. To him the emperor said, I will give you no office, lest you rob the provinces to benefit the Christians.

Acts Pet. 8.1¹¹

Those whose name he knew in advance were called at the end, so that one who has knowledge is the one whose name the Father has uttered. For he whose name has not been spoken is ignorant. Indeed, how is one to hear if his name has not been called? For he who is ignorant until the end is a creature of oblivion, and he will vanish along with it. If not, how is it that these miserable ones have no name, (how is it that) they do not have the call? Therefore, if one has knowledge, he is from above. If he is called, he hears, he answers, and he turns to him who is calling him, and ascends to him. And he knows in what manner he is called.

Gospel of Truth [NHC 1,3] 21.27–22.10.¹²

Both Maximilla, the co-leader of a prophetic and apocalyptic movement (the ‘New Prophecy’, i.e. Montanism), and the senator Marcellus, a fictitious character in the Acts of Peter – whom we can take as a representative of well-off and socially influential Jesus-followers –, believe in the authority and final jurisdiction of Christ just as Ignatius does.¹³ This commitment matters to all three, the bishop, the prophetess and the wealthy patron. Yet, in the course of the second century CE, i.e. the period between the beginning of Ignatius’ authoritative teaching and the composition of the Acts of Peter, a struggle has broken out in the main urban areas where organised Christian groups had established themselves. The conflict is about who has the authority to interpret the implications

¹¹ Tr. Elliott (1993). All other citations from the Acts of Peter are from this version.
¹² Tr. Attridge and MacRae (2000, vol. 1).
¹³ As recognised, for example, in Paul’s Romans and 1 Corinthians. On Maximilla and Paul, see Trevett (1996, 130). On the familiarity of the Acts of Peter with the Pauline letters, see Thomas (2003, 28).

By contrast, the enlightened author of the third passage, taken from the Coptic Gospel of Truth,¹⁰ seems to have neither a judicial-jurisdictional conception of the role of Jesus nor of the otherworldly order to which he belongs. As a superhuman agent sent to reveal a complete and all-encompassing salvific knowledge, Jesus does not dominate, reign, or rule; rather he teaches that where he comes from, which is also the place to which he aims to bring his disciples back, no one dominates or rules.¹⁵ Messiahs who erase the law are all false messiahs. However, even though this Jesuology tones down messianic theocracy, including its peculiar scenario of a struggle for jurisdictional dominance over the world, its representatives – here, possibly, the Gnostic teacher Valentinus – are objectively involved in the struggle within the emergent Christian social universe; just as Ignatius, Maximilla and Marcellus are.

An alternative way of representing the situation might be to draw on the language of political economy: what kind of capital (A: juridical-divine and apostolic, B: ecstatic-prophetic, C: social and economic, D: gnoseo-ontological) is capable of endowing its owner (A: leaders of the ordained clergy, B: charismatics, C: great laymen, D: enlightened) with the right to occupy the dominant position in the new religious field?

2.2. Conflict with the charismatics

Since the time of Max Weber, it has become a truism that bishops prevailed over charismatics by enforcing and imposing the principle of the charisma of office over personal charisma as the basis for defining both those who are authorised to produce religious capital and the nature of religious capital itself as an institutionalised resource. Such precious capital, say the winners, must be in the hands of the mainstream clergy, above all the bishops, and cannot be allowed to float freely from one location to another.

The victory of the ordained clergy over the motley range of its extra-ordinary competitors – wandering prophets, inspired leaders of grouplets, martyrs and confessors claiming sacramental and disciplinary authority, etc. – is the outcome

¹⁴ I choose the Valentinians as a prototype of the enlightened precisely on the account of the centrality of Jesus in their systems, by comparison with the so-called Sethian texts. On this point, see King (2003, 159) and Brakke, (2010, 102). I return to this issue below.

¹⁵ On the monarchic representation of the divine Pleroma and the transcendent God, see Filoramo (2002, 198–199). An example is provided by Clement of Alexandria, Exc. Theodot. 72.2.
of a conflict that we can already see smouldering in some early prescriptive passages such as \textit{Didaché} 12–13 and 15 (apparently written in Syria-Palestine and dated to the first half of 2\textsuperscript{nd} century) between sedentary groups dependent on farming, with their hierarchy, and itinerant prophets, who rely on them for food.\textsuperscript{16} Control of what we may with Foucault call the ‘modes of veridiction’ or the ‘alethurgic forms’\textsuperscript{17} of the charismatics, and so establishing the criteria for differentiating between true and false prophecy (\textit{προφητεία}), distinguishing true from false possession (\textit{ἐκτασία}) (Tabbernee 2007, 87–105), or even denouncing prophecy altogether (Trevett 1996, 65),\textsuperscript{18} went hand in hand with the reinforcement of the bishop’s ruling power by appeal to his own charisma of office. The institutionalisation of an ecclesiastical command-structure headed by elected officers was thus successfully combined with the charismatisation of the office. The rapid spread of ordination by the laying on of hands is clear evidence of this double strategy (Stewart-Sykes 2002, 124–125).

The conflict between ordinary organisation and extraordinary action, between banalising and de-banalising (Bourdieu 1991, 24) religious powers, is carried on by means of bans, excommunications and anathemas on the one hand, disavowals and schisms on the other. At the same time, in the case of early Christianity we can also discern the exchange relations and the strategic compromises by which the extra-ordinary could be incorporated into the dominant institution. In Bourdieu’s view, both kinds of relations (competition and exchange) “constitute the principle of the dynamic of the religious field” (Bourdieu 1991, 17). I discuss two such cases here.

(1) To start with the relation of competition, one can see how, at some stage, measures to control ‘pseudo-prophecy’ came to be associated with strategies for safeguarding orthodoxy. Among the so-called architects of the Great Church, Irenaeus of Lyon provides a grotesquely distorted account of the prophetic performances of the Marcosian women:

\begin{quote}
It appears probable enough that this man [i.e., Marcus, an ‘enlightened’ figure of the ‘school’ of Valentinus active in the Rhone valley]\textsuperscript{19} possesses a demon as his familiar spirit, by means of whom he seems able to prophesy (\textit{προφητεύειν δοκεῖ}) and also enables as many as he counts worthy to be partakers of his charis themselves to prophesy (\textit{προφητεύειν δοκεῖ}) and also enables as many as he counts worthy to be partakers of his charis themselves to prophesy (\textit{προφητεύειν δοκεῖ}).
\end{quote}

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{16} See Alikin (2010, 73); Niederwimmer (1989, 243).
\item \textsuperscript{17} See Foucault (2011, 8 and 3): “Etymologically, alethurgy would be the production of truth, the act by which truth is manifested”. The coinage was part of his late interest in ‘le souci de la vérité’.
\item \textsuperscript{18} See the vibrant protest in \textit{Pass. Perp. 1} and the rejection of the \textit{Shepherd of Hermas} in the late second-century Roman \textit{Muratorian Fragment}/\textit{Kanon Muratori} (see e.g. Hahnemann 1992).
\item \textsuperscript{19} On this figure, see Förster (1999).
\end{itemize}
He devotes himself especially to women, and those such as are well-bred, and elegantly attired, and of great wealth, whom he frequently seeks to draw after him, by addressing them in such seductive words as these [the quotation of the ritual formula for transmitting prophetic skills follows] [...] She then, vainly puffed up and elated (χαυνωθεσία και κεπφωθεσία) by these words, and greatly excited in soul (διαθερμανθεσία τῆς ψυχῆς) by the expectation that it is herself who is to prophesy, her heart beating violently from emotion, reaches the requisite pitch of audacity, and idly as well as impudently (κενῶς καὶ τολμηρῶς) utters some nonsense as it happens to occur to her, such as might be expected from one heated by an empty spirit... But such spirits as are commanded by these men, and speak when they desire it, are earthly and weak, audacious and impudent, sent forth by Satan for the seduction and perdition of those who do not hold fast that well-compacted faith which they received at first through the Church.

Iren. haer. 1.13.3 and 4.20

Rich women, suggests the bishop, have more than wealth. They are also ambitious and unrestrained, that is, inclined to vanity (Gr.: κεπφωθεσία;21 the Latin version has elata) and shamelessness (Gr.: τολμηρῶς; Lat.: audaciter),22 a trait that is typical of their class. They have the right amount of what Lenski has termed “status inconsistency” (Lenski 1961, 485–494) to arouse expectations about their own religious talent – especially if it is oriented towards one of the less gendered religious acts, namely prophecy.23 The only antidote for this diabolical deception is to cling to the faith of the church, which is embodied and transmitted by ministers who teach that it is not possible to prophesy on command (haer. 1.13.4, ll. 69–73). It is not by chance that the most faithful women “have withdrawn from such a vile company of revellers” (ibid. ll. 65–69).

(2) The second area concerns the ‘exchange relations’ (Bourdieu 1991, 17) between ecclesiastical authorities and those endowed with extra-ordinary charismatic powers, including exorcists (on whom see Nicolotti 2011, 80–84) and, above all, confessors. Their enrolment as functional members of the clergy is clear evidence that religious capital can be unpacked and distributed among several different producers under the aegis of the bishop. The best example is per-

20 I use the version of Roberts and Donaldson (1995 [=1885], vol. 1). All other citations from Irenaeus’ treatise are from this translation.
21 The verb κεπφῶμαι literally means ‘trap, ensnare’ [κέπφος is the name of an unidentified, rather plump, bird that lived by shallow waters and was evidently easy to catch, cf. Arist., Hist. an. 8.35, 620a14–16]; the verb occurs almost exclusively in a metaphorical sense in the passive ‘easily misled, ingenuous, light-minded’.
22 Here transcribed and despised in sexual terms. Predictably, such a habit of ‘rewarding’ the grace received is mentioned (Iren. haer. 1.13.3, ll. 59–59). Förster (1999, 123–126) rightly expresses doubts about this representation of libertinage.
23 With regard to early Christianity see Jensen (2003, 254–362).
haps the *modus operandi* of Cyprian of Carthage during and immediately after the Decian persecution (from May 250 to March 251).

To appreciate its subtlety, one must consider the context in which this strategy was adopted: on the one hand, there is the uncertainty regarding the penalties to be imposed on those who have sacrificed, on the other, we have the objective pastoral weakness of the bishop (who had himself fled) over against those who remained, had not sacrificed but actually been tortured, and are now visited in prison by ‘fallen’ and anxious believers. Having little room for manoeuvre, Cyprian opted for recognising the power of the charismatic intercession of martyrs and confessors concerning penance, reconciliation and readmission of the *lapsi* into the church. Yet, at the same time, he tried to limit the force of the concession in three ways: a) by limiting it formally to the recommendation of individual penitents (*nominatim*) and not groups (ep. 15.4), (b) by subordinating it to episcopal authorisation via the laying on of hands (ep. 15; 16; 17), and (c) linking it chronologically to the end of the persecution and the restoration of the Lord’s peace (*pax domini*),²⁴ in order to allow him to return to Carthage and hold a synod on penitential matters (ep. 17.3.2; 20.3; 16.1.2; 33.2.1; etc).

Cyprian’s interpretation of the Decian persecution as divine punishment (e.g. ep. 11) underpins the ‘sociodicy’ of the bishop’s faction, insofar as it provides a means of re-affirming the religious ‘good fortune’ of the clergy.²⁵ The bishop is under pressure from two sides, on the one hand from the self-interested charismaticism of the *lapsi* and laxist priests, and on the other from the spiritual aristocracy and rigour of martyrs and confessors (Brent 2010, 10). Part of the bishop’s strategy to secure his position is to assert his right to discharge and re-admit apostates:

For this the fallen can certainly be pardoned. Who would not, when dead, hasten to be brought to life? Who would not make speed to gain his own salvation? But it is the duty of the appointed leaders to adhere to the commandments and give instructions to both the hasty and the ignorant. Otherwise there is the danger that those who ought to be shepherds of their flock may become the butchers. To grant concessions which lead to destruction is to deceive. This is not the way to lift the fallen to his feet; rather, by offending God, he is being driven towards total ruin. And so let those who ought themselves to have been the teachers be taught at least by you [i.e., the confessors]. They should keep your petitions and requests for the bishop, awaiting the seasonable time (when peace has been restored)

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²⁴ Brent suggests (2010, 55 – 68) that we should view *pax domini* as the counterpart within the constitutional church of the traditional Roman *pax dei*.

²⁵ Bourdieu’s claim that “theodicies are always sociodicies” (Bourdieu 1991, 16) is the result of applying the Weberian concept of theodicy differentially to different social groups.
for granting the peace which you request. The mother needs first to receive peace from the
Lord and then the question of peace for her son can be considered, in the way you desire.²⁶

Cyprian is here grounding his claim to jurisdiction over penitential matters in
a normative tradition that actually does not exist. A legal epistemologist
would see a rule (praecptum) being enforced here through its infraction. The
rule of ecclesial readmission through episcopal reconciliation is historically
and existentially second, but logically and theologically first (i.e. prior to the in-
fraction that it sanctions): ‘logically’ because, according to a normative order, in-
fraction is always the violation of an existing prohibition;²⁷ ‘theologically’ be-
cause, as the ‘episcopal’ Jesus of Nazareth claims, “the church is founded
upon the bishops” (ep. 33.1; see also 59.4).

Anyway, once their ‘religious capital’ has been granted legitimacy, some
confessors seem willing to recognise the fullness of a bishop’s sacramental
and disciplinary prerogatives.²⁸ Moreover, the rapid relaxation of the principle
established in the synod of Carthage (Spring 251 CE) reduces ‘the explicit price
of entry’ into the field still further (Bourdieu 2004, 50), in that reconciliation
and immediate re-admission could be obtained by means of the ‘minimum re-
quirement’ of public penance and episcopal blessing. A non-negotiable offer
is made to all the charismatic positions deemed at odds with the main-line ecc-
clesiological vision: either integration – under much more favourable conditions
than before – or schism.

2.3. Competition with ‘great laymen’

By ‘great laymen’ I mean the wealthiest, most powerful and influential members
of the various local ἐκκλησίαι/ecclesiae, that is, people with a more or less exten-
sive power of patronage. Some Latin sources occasionally call them seniores (e.g.
Tert. Apol. 39.5; Pass. Perp. 12).²⁹ The tension was handled by making the ‘prin-
cIPLE of internal hierarchisation’ prevail over the ‘principle of external hierarchi-
isation’ (Bourdieu 1996, 217) in defining who was authorised to produce religious

²⁶ Cypr. ep. 15.2, tr. Clarke (1984, vol. 1). All other citations from Cyprian’s letters are from this
version.
²⁷ “Consequently it is not paradoxical to say that the abnormal, while logically second, is ex-
istentially first” (Canguilhem 1991, 243).
²⁸ According to Burns (2002, 22), most of them. The reference is to ep. 25.1.2.
²⁹ The question is much debated: see Stewart-Sykes (2002, 118ff.).
capital and distinguish in practical terms between producers and consumers of religious goods and services. It would be quite wrong to imagine that it was the loss of the traditional means of religious production experienced by a wealthy *paterfamilias* on becoming a Jesus-follower that ensured the dominance of the bishop over the high-status patron. For early on, and probably for many decades, ἐπίσκοποι and πρεσβύτεροι are found in charge of Jesus-groups inasmuch as they both organised and largely financed a domestic cult in which the patronage model was taken for granted.\(^{30}\)

Yet, however much his religious capital may have derived from his activities as patron, the bishop’s point of view could truly prevail only when the principle of the separation of the religious office from the candidate’s economic and social assets came to be formally established. That is the point when the government of the church turned into a professional office, thereby evolving towards an autonomous status independent of any duties associated with the material support of the congregations (Stewart-Sykes 1991).\(^{31}\) As they grew in size and number, such groups became more and more expensive to sponsor, so that, in the end, it is they who began to pay salaries to their own ministers.

The (ecclesiological) foundations of this principle seem already to underlie the paraenetic discourse of the canonised *Pastoral Letters*, a single block of pseudonymous texts from Asia Minor possibly dating to the age of Hadrian (117–138 CE):

> Tell the rich in this world not to be arrogant and not to put their hope upon the uncertainty of wealth, but rather upon God who supplies us with all things richly for our enjoyment. Tell them to do good work, to be wealthy in noble deeds, to be generous in giving, to be sharers of possessions, thereby storing up for themselves a noble foundation for the future, so that they can lay hold of real life.

*I Tim* 6:17–19.\(^{32}\)

Under the name of Paul, the author of *1 Timothy* urges the rich to get rid of their own class pride (μὴ ὑψηλοφρονεῖν), to make their resources available and to place all their hopes (ἡλπικέναι) in the generous patronage of God by investing in the special fund (θεμέλιον) of future salvation. This call to surrender a portion of one’s own assets for an eschatological profit – i.e. for the sake of a future

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\(^{31}\) Yet, in Cyprian’s Africa, where the bishop continues to operate as *patronus*, even the rite of ordination suggests a framework of patronage: see Stewart-Sykes (2002, 115–130).

\(^{32}\) Tr. Johnson (2001). All other citations from *1 Timothy* are from this version.
'treasure' (ἀποθησαυρίζοντας) – contains an implicit demand to turn economic capital into spiritual capital33 ("be wealthy in noble deeds!") and possibly shows a first textual hint of the imposition of a specific conversion-rate of economic capital into religious capital.34

Theoretically, then, the aim of transferring some economic assets to the ἐκκλησία is to garner a treasure in heaven. Yet this does not exclude investing a fraction of this treasure in order to make a double ‘profit’ in this world, helping donors to increase their own spiritual capital and so reassert their social position within the religious group. In other words, spiritual capital, which is specifically associated with Christ’s saving patronage of well-off Christian benefactors, can cover part of the cost of their ecclesiastical patronage; to gain the other part, one has to await the real life (τῆς οντως ζωῆς), that is, the afterlife. This deferral is not however compatible with hopes of – let alone claims to – church leadership strictly based on one’s financial resources.

The author of 1 Timothy separates the injunctions regarding the bishop from those for the rich, placing them in two different sections of the text (ἐπίσκοπος: 1Tim 3:1–7; πλουσιοί: 6:17–19). This seems to indicate that for him the short-term convertibility of financial resources and social power into symbolic capital (gratitude, loyalty, prestige, even spiritual adequacy) is irrelevant to the right to dispense the goods of salvation and so to the legitimate exercise of religious power. Economic assets may become religious capital only if routed through the ‘clearing house’ of the clergy.35 Those who date the letter after the middle of the second century are prepared to find throughout the text some allusions to Marcion, the shipowner from Pontus who, thanks to an initial donation of 200,000 sesterces (Tertullian, Praescr. 30.2), is supposed to have launched his own takeover bid for control over the unstable and contested Christian regula fidei.36 One of these

33 Pace Verter (2003), the non-Bourdieuian notion of ‘spiritual capital’ can hardly replace the original notion of ‘religious capital’. Whereas the latter amounts to the legitimate authority to rule the group, the former may designate the set of religious competences, preferences, credentials and markers for distinguishing lay benefactor from the lay group of recipients.
34 The flexibility of the conversion-rate is indicated by the not uncommon election to the rank of bishop by ‘popular will’ of some honestiores lacking ecclesiastical qualification, such as Fabianus in Rome (Euseb. Hist eccl. 6.29.2–3). As I stress below, even Cyprian of Carthage himself lacked specifically religious qualification (Pontius, Vit. Cypr. 5).
35 I do not share L.W. Countryman’s assumption that “in the Pastoralis, the intent was clearly to co-opt such men into the clergy” (Countryman 1980, 167).
supposed references is precisely about deluded people who think that godliness is a means of financial gain:

If anyone teaches otherwise and does not attend to the healthy words of our Lord Jesus Christ and the teaching that accords with godliness, that person is deluded, understanding nothing. Instead, he is sick from debates and controversies, from which come envy and strife and reviling speech, evil suspicions, the constant wrangling of people with corrupted minds. And defrauded from the truth, they think that godliness is a means of financial gain (νομιζόντων πορισμὸν εἶναι τὴν εὐσέβειαν).

1Tim. 6:3–6.

The general principle of the ideal independence of the authorised production of Christian religious goods and services from social and economic capital can be seen at work in the *Acts of Peter*, a text written in Asia Minor and dating from a few decades after the *Pastorals* (late second century CE). A work of popular religious propaganda, intended to promote but also reshape the role of Christian patrons, its basic message may be summarised as follows: No donor becomes a leader in the community (Stoops 1986, 95). All the well-off and well-adjusted characters of the story, starting with the senator Marcellus, whom I have already mentioned, are represented as unsteady, naive and unperceptive: they are disastrous as leaders, since they are liable to drag the whole group into the spiritual bankruptcy of heresy. Some of Marcellus’ clients are made to ascribe their ‘apostasy’ to the influence of Simon Magus over the senator:

This, brother Peter, we know and report to you, now that the great benevolence of the man has been turned into blasphemy. For had he not been changed (versatus non fuisse) we certainly should not have left the holy faith in God our Lord. Now this Marcellus is enraged and repents of his good deeds and says, “So much wealth have I spent for such a long time in the foolish belief that I spent it for the knowledge of God.”


Had Cyprian been like Marcellus, the history of Christianity in Africa would have taken a different turn. Between 248 and 249 CE, this man, a newly-converted but wealthy patron, was appointed bishop in Carthage by the vote of the ‘whole people’ (*populi universi suffragio*), but in reality with the endorsement of other influential benefactors and the acclamation of their numerous clients within the

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37 Vinzent’s much more expressive translation of the passage is “(people who) think religion should yield dividends” (Vinzent 2011, 127).

38 See also the rich and “honesta nimis in seculo hoc” Eubula, who was swindled by Simon’s men in Jerusalem (*Acts Pet.* 17).
Christian populace (ep. 59.6, but also 43.1:2; 5.4; Pontius, Vit. Cypr. 5). Moreover, this bishop-patronus continued regularly to support the most needy of the congregation out of his own pocket (de quantitate [su]a propri[ae]a) even after his flight to escape the Decian persecution (ep. 7.2; 13.7; 41.1 etc.), while the presbyters receive wage-like sportulae in the normal manner of clients (ep. 39.5.2).

In Carthage, then, the Christian religious field seems to have been shaped by the logic of patronage relations, such that the exchange between socio-economic capital (patronal power) and religious capital (episcopacy) appears highly favourable to the former. However, the competition between the bishop-patronus and other lay donors induced Cyprian to take a number of steps to professionalise the clergy and reduce its dependence on non-episcopal support. The three most important are: (a) the claim that episcopal election is an expression of popular and divine will (e.g. ep. 43.1; 67.4 – 5), (b) a deliberate recruitment strategy for the clergy (ep. 38; 39; 40), and (c) the establishment of a rudimentary cursus honorum (e.g. ep. 29). 40

In general, all that ecclesiastical hierarchies needed to impose was a minimum threshold to hinder the conversion of social power into specifically religious leadership. They opposed the purchase of religious capital (i.e. what will be later be termed simony), since it negates the difference between patron and clergy by nullifying the religious labour of the latter. Another danger they perceived was that patronage might support the enemies of the faith, such as the misguided patrons of the Acts of Peter, or the alleged vanity of the rich women lured by Marcus the Valentinian and his followers (Iren. haer. 1.13.3). 41

Despite such conflicts between socio-economic and religious power, early Christianity escaped becoming wholly proletarianised. To be sure, mediocritas would remain the “solid keel of the Christian congregations” (Brown 2012, 81) even in the fourth and fifth centuries, but was not incompatible with a growing number of wealthy individuals, even egregii and clarissimi. Religious hierarchies,

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39 For the initial donation to the poor, see Pontius, Vit. Cypr. 2. 7. On the semantic evolution of suffragium from the end of the Republic onwards, see still de Ste. Croix (1954, 33 – 48).
40 In this case it is a matter of appointing presbyteri doctores for the instruction of the catechumens and lectores to assist the priests involved in teaching.
41 Another example might be the case of Theodotus, the Roman money-lender who paid Natalius, a bishop of his ‘heresy’ (ἐπίσκοπος […] ταύτης τῆς αἰρέσεως) a salary of 150 denarii a month to take care of the group that followed his adoptionist doctrine, which had split off from the main congregation led by Zephyrinus (Euseb. Hist. eccl. 5.28.8 – 10). On ‘disguised patronage’ see further Stoops (1986); Perkins (1995, 133).
fully aware of the value of a wealthy patron, never hesitated to procure possible beneficiaries for needy groups.⁴²

For well-off people to be personally interested in church affairs, there needed to be a reliable trade-off between them and the clergy. The symbolic and material support provided by the ‘great laymen’ to the structures ruled by the religious hierarchy was rewarded by pastoral teachings and training in which the social order is barely questioned. Such teaching confined itself for the most part to a religious reassessment of private domination (over wives, children and slaves) and the role of patronus (vis-à-vis clients and subalterns in general). In 1Tim ‘Paul’ claims that it is God’s will that the proper asymmetry between slaves and masters be not upset, a position that encourages the mischievous metaphorisation of the conventional language of patronage:

Let those who are slaves under a yoke regard their own masters as worthy of all respect, so that the name of God and the teaching may not be blasphemed. And those who have believers as masters should not despise them (μὴ καταφρονείτωσαν), because they are brothers. Rather they should serve them better (μᾶλλον δουλεύτωσαν), because those who are receiving their benefaction⁴³ are believers and beloved (ὅτι πιστοί εἰσιν καὶ ἀγαπητοὶ οἱ τῆς εὐεργεσίας ἀντιλαμβανόμενοι).

1Tim 6:1–2.

2.4. The struggle against the enlightened

We have seen that charismatics may be absorbed into the church, and the wealth of the great laymen co-opted to serve church structures for the common good. Yet there still remain some opponents who cannot be integrated by such strategies and even try to move the goalposts (see Bourdieu 1993, 134): they dispute the clergy’s domination of the field, and refuse to accept the principles that are claimed to legitimate that dominance.

What these people seem to question is the very idea that ἐκκλησίαι/ecclesiae must be structured, organised and dominated by appeal to any type of socio-symbolic property, whether it be institutional grace, gift of the spirit, extraordinary resistance to intimidation and torture, wealth and social influence, skill in

⁴² See Lampe’s reading of the apocalyptic paraenesis in The Shepherd of Hermas (Lampe 2003, 90–99).
⁴³ It is hard to agree that the author is here “using conventional shame/honour language in a manner subversive of the system itself” (Johnson 2001, 285). The exegetical dispute over the alternative between ‘masters-as-benefactors’ and ‘slaves-as-benefactors’ is old as the Vulgate and John Chrysostom.
exegesis, family relationship to the founder. Their own mystic knowledge of the divine and its relation to the world is founded upon a different reading of (almost) the same series of cosmic and historical events from which the bishop draws his knowledge-power. This reading entitles them to downgrade clerical-episcopal authority, without claiming that they themselves are entitled to rule or concern themselves with visible leadership. While admitting the circulation of different Christian currencies, they in effect deny that such an admission legitimates any claim to definitive religious power.

The Valentinians, that is, the various disciples who understood themselves as influenced by the Egyptian master Valentinus (see Thomassen 2006), who was active in Rome between c.135 and 169 CE, considered ideological dissent regarding proper beliefs, experiences and conduct a natural fact, perhaps even an anthropological given. They may even have looked upon such differences with some soteriological optimism and confident missionary zeal. Otherwise they would not have ‘lovingly’ (Lampe 2003, 388, also Brakke 2010, 115–119) mixed with the non-enlightened (‘Psychic’) groups of Jesus-followers in order to invite them to their own meetings and perhaps put them through a systematic course of instruction (Layton 1987, 306, referring to Ptolemy’s Letter to Flora [ap. Epiph. haer. 33.3–7], as though they were infiltrating a class of promising students taught by an unsatisfactory master.

A few decades after Valentinus’ failed attempt to become a bishop, Florinus, a former pupil of Polycarp but also one of these ‘enlightened’ individuals, took over one of the various congregations in Rome and became a priest. According to Irenaeus, he taught doctrines that were incompatible with those of Bishop Victor and allegedly quite inappropriate for one holding a priestly office:

These opinions, Florinus, that I may speak sparingly, do not belong to sound doctrine. These opinions, Florinus, do not reflect sound judgment. These opinions are inconsistent with the church, and bring those who believe them into the greatest impiety. These opinions not even the heretics outside the church (ἔξω τῆς ἐκκλησίας) ever dared to proclaim (Iren. ep. Flor., ap. Euseb. Hist. eccl. 5.20.4).

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44 What does being “inscribed in the book of the living” (Gos. Truth [NHC I,3] 21:4–5) imply exactly? Scholars have long disagreed over the nature of the predestination: see, e.g., Ménard (1972, 104) (“prédestination gnostique”) contra Grobel (1960, 75) (“ex post facto predestination – where the factum is the acceptance of good news”). According to King (2003, 193), the Gospel of Truth posits that all humanity will be saved in the end. The Tripartite Tractate too anticipates the ultimate entrance of the Psychics into the pleroma (Tri. Trac. [NHC I,5] 123).

45 Euseb. Hist. eccl. 5.20.5–6.

In the course of his teaching in a Valentinian ‘community house’ on the Via Latina Florinus expounded to the *illuminandi* the gospel of Valentinus, that is, the advanced version of the revelation. But when he worked with Victor and celebrated the Eucharist in the congregation of the ‘Psychics’, his teaching “resembled the doctrine of the faithful” (Iren. *haer.* 3.17.4), in full accordance with what Polycarp used to preach and Irenaeus now professes.

These ‘enlightened’ persons held to a triadic anthropology, optimistic soteriology, and a ‘concentric’, *soft* ecclesiology. Their view of religious knowledge-power did not include monopolistic claims on the government of congregations. Personal career plans did not imply exclusive rights to all church leaderships. This weakly-developed conception of governance was a serious challenge to those who, like Irenaeus, were intent on constructing and policing an institution tailored so that they might hold leading positions. Such a programmatic invisibility and indifference to institutionalised prominence, which blurred the ecclesiastical space of representation, was an affront to the church’s emergent hierarchy. Their claimed ‘gnoseo-ontological’ capital infiltrated structures that hierarchs wished to control by means of juridico-apostolic capital. From Irenaeus’ standpoint, these people were worse than enemies: they were false friends and deceivers.

The Valentinians thus gave improper answers to questions about representation, organisation, and the internal hierachisation. How can the hierarchs combat those unwilling to show themselves, let alone fight? How were they to create a clear line of separation against those who actually tolerate different opinions, and in their own systems permit different visions and even different principles of vision (Dunderberg 2005, 94)? Valentinians did not even believe there was an ‘outside the church’ (*ἐξω τῆς ἐκκλησίας*), and thus rejected the use of descriptive tags and labels apart from ‘Christians’ (see Gos. *Phil.* [NHC II,3] 52:24; 62:31; 64:25; 67:26). Perhaps they did not even care much about those who decided to defect: “Make steady the feet of those who have stumbled and stretch out your hands to those who are sick [...] Focus your attention upon yourselves. Do not focus your attention upon others, that is, ones whom you have expelled” (Gospel of Truth 33.1–3 and 12–15). Such a struggle required a new discursive formation, a

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47 On a probable Valentinian text such as the *Apocryphon of James* (NHC I,2), see Rouleau (1987, 17–22).

48 I follow here the version of Layton (1987) rather than Attridge and MacRae, who translate: “do not be concerned with other things which you have rejected from yourselves” (italics mine). Orlandi too thinks the Coptic word *hnkaye* (‘others’) refers to people rather than things: Orlandi (1992, 67).
unique ‘regulatory scheme’ (Le Boulluec 1985, 1:15–16) capable of generating a specific set of enunciative strategies aimed at detecting and suppressing doctrinal dissent. In other words, it required a new device and a new engine: ‘heresy’. 49

Of course, I do not claim that heresy and heresiology were invented to neutralise precisely this ‘enlightened’ view of church order. In fact, as Irenaeus says of his predecessors, “they did not know enough about their systems”, 50 and so their attacks failed to hit home. Indeed, the inventor of heresy, Justin (Martyr) of Neapolis, probably did not include the followers of Valentinus among the heretics until his last work, the Dialogue with Trypho (Lampe 2003, 390; more cautiously, Dunderberg 2005, 77). 51 As a universal passe-partout for decoding division by emphasising differences, heresy was as yet the only weapon capable of warding off the challenge launched by such a spiritual elite, whose centrifugalism mocked the identitarian narcissism championed by the leaders of the Great Church.

When he writes that Valentinian doctrine is the recapitulatio [...] omnium haereticorum (haer. 4 praef. 2), Irenaeus is suggesting that the ontogeny of this particular species of heretic sums up the entire phylogeny of the genre. Target and device virtually overlap. Although it fits the excesses of the charismatics and the claims of some great laymen to specifically religious capital, the heresiological frame is particularly associated with the Great Church’s wrestling with the ‘enlightened’ and their subtle strategies of recruitment. Other forms of control were simply too crude for the intellectual skills of these masters. 52 They too could cite apostolic authorities and traditions (Koester 1987, 1–16); 53 they too were unquestionably skilled exegetes of biblical texts; they were careful not to challenge the principle of internal hierarchy for defining the legitimate producers of religious capital; they could speak of the Biblical creator in a non-dismis-

49 Le Boulluec (1985, 1:88) rightly uses the word artifice, defined by the Petit Robert as “moyen habile, ingénieux”.

50 ...ignorabant regulam ipsorum: Iren. haer. 4 praef. 2.

51 Valentinus is not mentioned among the heresiarchs in 1Apol. 1.26; while the Valentinian Ptolemy even receives praise: see 2Apol. 2.9–11. Although Justin’s character has often been identified with Valentinus’ pupil, the case cannot be proven.

52 This is probably true for Valentinus, Heracleon, Ptolemy, Florinus, Theodotus. Conversely, it may not be pure chance that Marcus’ group is called θίασος not σχολή at Iren. haer. 1.13.4.

53 At some point, the Valentinians began to link Valentinus with Paul via some intermediate figures like Teuda or Glacia, who are however unknown to us (see Clem. Al. Strom. 7.106.4). In his Letter, Ptolemy tells Flora to be “worthy of the apostolic tradition (τῆς ἀποστολικῆς πρα- δόσεως), which even we have received by apostolic succession (ἐκ διαδοχῆς)” (ap. Epiph. haer. 33.79).
sive and even sympathetic manner – at any rate, not more slightly than other people who championed updating his legislation by means of revelation (Layton 1987, 306).

What we might term the heresiological software re-set and re-organised the scattered incriminating evidence within an epistemologically ironclad framework. Repeatable and consistent, it recontextualised new and old polemical motifs as statements of properly (heresiological) subjects, objects, concepts and themes (Le Boulluec 1985 following Foucault 1969).\(^{54}\) This technique of updating and optimising the programme made it possible to reveal things hitherto unremarked and which, until a few years before, had never even been heard of. It was thus that the ‘wrong-doing and false-telling’ of the ‘enlightened’ could be successfully unmasked and fought off.

Once identified on Irenaeus’ heresiographical radar-screen, Florinus was apparently kicked out by his own bishop (Euseb. Hist. eccl. 5.15) and his works suppressed. Exclusion, however, was not the only method at hand: systematic deprecatory ‘interpellations’ could work as well. It does not really matter, Judith Butler argues, if the addressee of the interpellation does not respond to or protest against the name-calling. “Indifferent to protests, the force of interpellation continues to work” and, as the following passage of Tertullian clearly attests, constitute the subject “at a distance from her/himself”:\(^{55}\)

We know, I say, most fully their actual origin, and we are quite aware why we call them Valentinians, although they affect to disavow their name (Valentinianos appellamus, licet non esse videantur). They have departed, it is true, from their founder, yet their origin is by no means destroyed; and even if it chance to be changed, the very change bears testimony to the fact (testatio est ipsa mutatio) (Tert. Adv. Valent. 4.1).\(^{56}\)

### 3. Concluding remarks

I have identified three main strategies by means of which a Christian religious field favourable to bishops was constructed and the particular ‘economy of symbolic goods’ we know as early Christianity was shaped and institutionalised.

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\(^{54}\) Le Boulluec singles out two pivotal themes in the original programme: “L’un de ces thèmes dérive de l’historiographie grecque appliquée à la description des courants de pensée. L’autre reprend une tradition chrétienne aux fores diverses, celle de l’origine démoniaque des querelles, qui s’est édifiée principalement autour de la figure du faux prophète” (Le Boulluec 1985, 1:110).

\(^{55}\) Butler (1997, 33).

Tr. Roberts and Donaldson (1995 [= 1885], vol. 3/3).
These are: a) the imposition of institutional charisma; (b) the assertion of the autonomy of specifically religious power as against other socially-legitimate forms of influence; and (c) the elaboration of heresy as a toolkit for producing exclusion from dissent and turning similarity into otherness. In every market, the objective possibilities of profit rest on the creation of collective expectations matching the intentions of certain producers. A non-economic or, more precisely, an ‘anti-economic’ market such as the religious field, however, requires the denial of interest and calculation by both producers and consumers. To put the point somewhat differently, the collective misrecognition of the true nature of the religious exchange – that its ‘social logic’ consists in the asymmetrical exchange of religious goods and services – cannot be allowed to become common knowledge (Bourdieu 2000, 192).

References


57 “This anti-economic economy (using the restricted modern sense of ‘economic’) is based on the denial (Verneinung) of interest and calculation or, more precisely, on a collective labour devoted to maintaining misrecognition with a view to perpetuating a collective faith in the universal, which is simply a form of individual and collective bad faith (in the Sartrean sense of lying to oneself)” (Bourdieu 2000, 192).


