

Introduction

Group Portraits

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Electronic version

URL: <http://journals.openedition.org/assr/58838>

DOI: 10.4000/assr.58838

ISSN: 1777-5825

Publisher

Éditions de l'EHESS

Printed version

Date of publication: 27 February 2020

ISBN: 9782713228223

ISSN: 0335-5985

Electronic reference

Pierre Lassave, "Introduction", *Archives de sciences sociales des religions* [Online], Hors-série | 2020, Online since 18 March 2021, connection on 17 April 2021. URL: <http://journals.openedition.org/assr/58838> ; DOI: <https://doi.org/10.4000/assr.58838>

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Introduction

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- 1 The history of the social sciences is generally a matter of distinguishing disciplines from one another and qualifying these through an account of their respective foundations, lineage and traditions. Textbooks and specialist dictionaries convey its reasoned and authorised progression. Yet present and past sometimes collide in reflexive conjunctures that disrupt the march of paradigms. People overlooked by memory, often vanquished by outdated controversies, resurface to challenge previously accepted norms and truth values. A temporary lapse of dominant models and their fragmentation into multiple competing variants can also coincide with passing the baton from one generation to the next. This is particularly the case in the field of sociology of religion in France today where the creation of the archival record, after the death of a cohort of post-war “re-founders,” has been underway at the same time as their successors were retiring from academia and their positions were being assumed by their former students. Furthermore, this rather tacit symbolic exchange has been taking place at a pivotal moment during which the issue of religion is re-emerging with common sense understanding in the public sphere, after having long been relegated to realms of memory by secular institutions.
- 2 The group of five researchers whose lives will be portrayed herein come from this transitional period where experiences of knowledge acquisition cannot be understood without examining private tribulations and underlying sociocultural changes that accompany them. Belonging to (at least) two generations and different disciplines, the authors of these five portraits chose to adopt a biographical perspective when they set out to archive the work of the first members of the “*Groupe de sociologie des religions*” (GSR). The GSR, created within the *Centre d’Études Sociologiques* (CES) of the fledgling French National Centre for Scientific Research (CNRS) was, in the immediate post-war period,¹ a small, pioneering research team resolutely committed to the more or less cultivated lineage of Émile Durkheim and of Max Weber. From the beginning, the GSR distinguished itself by shunning scholarship based on autobiographical

confessions and knowledge gleaned from individuals' memoirs. The group is chiefly recognized for having founded, in 1956, the journal, *Archives de sociologie des religions*, which became the *Archives de sciences sociales des religions* in 1973, and is still thriving today with its collection of nearly 200 issues and international reach. In the wake of the GSR and its journal, today there are also more than one hundred full-time researchers in this discipline. In France, these are mainly concentrated in two different centres (called laboratories)² and some hold many of several professorships, both in the 5th and former 6th sections of the *École Pratique des Hautes Études* (since 1975, the 6th section is its own graduate school, *École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales*). At present, these social scientists are all called upon more than ever due to the renewed demand for making sense of what is said about and what is done in the name of religion.

Birth of a Research Group

- 3 Led by Gabriel Le Bras (1891-1970), dean of the law school and member of the first executive committee of the *Centre d'Études Sociologiques* (along with Georges Gurvitch and Henri Lévy-Bruhl), a small, initial core group brought together, in 1954, four future professional researchers bent on rediscovering sociology as it was rising from its ashes of the inter-war period. These men came from diverse backgrounds. Henri Desroche (1914-1994), the eldest founding member of the GSR, was an intellectual leader of economic and social studies in the Dominican Order (the group *Économie et humanisme* founded by Joseph Lebrét in 1941)³, whose own exegetical work on Marx was condemned by Rome. By the early 1950s, this enterprising but contentious scholar left the Order and joined the CNRS where he inaugurated a vast research programme on messianic movements and development economics in the Third World. At his side was François-André Isambert (1924-2017), a philosophy professor (*agrégé*) and assistant to Georges Gurvitch at the Sorbonne, a man who had been in both the Resistance and the First Liberation Army. With Desroche and supervised by Le Bras, then Chair of Sociology of Religion (created in 1948 in the 6th section of the EPHE), Isambert took part in the collection of surveys on church attendance and on parish life, which Le Bras had conducted since the 1930s. He also helped draft the first assessment of the sociology of world religions on behalf of UNESCO. It was during this period of cooperation that the idea to create a research team within the aspiring *Centre d'Études Sociologiques* was born, following the example of other specialist fields being developed at the time (industrial sociology around Alain Touraine and under Georges Friedmann, urban sociology with Paul-Henry Chombart de Lauwe, sociology of leisure with Joffre Dumazedier, rural sociology with Henri Lefebvre and Henri Mendras, etc.). Émile Poulat (1920-2014) and Jacques Maître (1925-2013) joined the initial core group. The former, a rebellious priest connected to the worker-priest movement, of which he was the historian, also converted to sociology with the support of Ignace Meyerson, creator of historical psychology. The latter, who had also been a member of the armed Resistance, under the command of his young philosophy teacher in Toulouse (Jean-Pierre Vernant), was another of Gurvitch's assistants recruited by Le Bras. A fifth participant joined the Group and later became part of its inner circle: Jean Séguy (1925-2007), Jesuit applicant, dramatically rejected by his Company, English teacher and follower of Desroche (Chair of sociology of cooperation created in 1957 in the 6th section of the

EPHE) who got him hired by the CNRS for his historical, Weber-inspired surveys on Anabaptist sects.

- 4 Although these profiles may appear “atypical” today, they fit the “adventurous” norm of post-war recruits as Jean-René Tréanton pointed out in his testimonial of the early years of the *Centre d'Études Sociologiques*:

This is how, among the first recruits of the CES, one could encounter renegade soldiers, worker-priests abandoned by their Church, popular activists concerned with broadening their horizons, uninspired novelists, etc., in short, a population of adventurers in the eyes of the academic establishment.⁴

- 5 To these briefly summarised descriptions, we must add the suggestive participant-observer account given by Jean Duvignaud, a fellow adventurer seeking knowledge:

1955-1956 – a year of encounters. Parallel lives come together in a complicity of coincidence and affinities: people of similar ages and comparable experiences, more or less opposed to the “big system,” critical of a society that was put together by the previous generation after the Liberation of France, mixing Christianity, Gaullism and a hazy socialism with the murky remains of the Vichy government. Inconceivable at the time, no doctrine united them and much less any of the images of freedom which were too conceptual to make anyone happy. Inconceivable today, as I write, none of these vagabonds are looking for fame, positions or political influence. They are simply there, and they appeal to the conscience, neither good nor bad, just the conscience. “For this moment, man alone, without external assistance, armed solely with his own arms.” The shadow of Montaigne.⁵

- 6 More generally, after the war, sociology, then a marginal specialisation within the philosophy curriculum, had to cope with a dual handicap: the first was the delayed development of social sciences compared to that of natural sciences, the second was the head start the North American model had had with respect to social and economic field research, theoretical developments and their related schools (functionalism, rational choice, symbolic interactionism, etc.). As for several different research organisations, such as the French Institute for Demographic Studies (INED) or the National Institute of Statistics and Economic Studies (INSEE), the creation of the *Centre d'études sociologiques* in 1946 within the CNRS made it possible for French sociology to make up for lost time. It nonetheless faced significant obstacles: the hostility of various Marxist scholars was pitted against a “bourgeois” discipline, the irony of existentialists criticized “police” knowledge that reduced social facts to mere things, not to mention the contempt of the academic world towards an overly ambitious speciality that aspired to free itself from philosophy and history. The country’s spirit of modernisation and democratic renewal which motivated Marshall Plan scholars and administrators, guided by the example of the pre-war American New Deal, embraced sociology for programmes and research contracts focusing on pressing everyday issues: the reconstruction of towns, labour organisation, working-class life, the rural world, education and teaching, the advent of leisure activities, etc. Indeed, religious life was far removed from these realities, which in turn increased the marginality of this upcoming research team at the time. The team’s adventure nevertheless followed the progressive institutionalisation of the discipline, with the creation, in 1958, through the efforts of Raymond Aron, professor at the Sorbonne, of bachelor’s and doctoral degrees in faculties of literature and human sciences. As will be detailed further on, the Group that had started out as a team of ten or so people, including technical and administrative staff, became a full-fledged research unit (laboratory) in the 1970s with around thirty members.

- 7 Early on, this pioneering team was the result of the encounter between clerics in conflict with the Roman Catholic Church and resistance fighters involved in the progressive Christian movement close to the Communist Party. They also shared the dream of revolutionising religious studies through a sociological approach that would not be limited to this discipline alone, but resolutely reliant on a historical perspective. These scholars, who were faced early on with German totalitarianism or with the inflexibility of the Vatican, pursued careers as researchers at the new CNRS, as if it were a lifeline, in order to give meaning to the conflicts and fractures they had experienced. They all had Catholicism in common, but each member of the team detached himself from it in his own way through the more or less total transformation of a belief and culture into an object of research, even if it meant, for some, surreptitiously devoting themselves to a substitute “religion of science.” This shift in perspective already had a long history, at the very least dating back to Ernest Renan’s famous “Prayer on the Acropolis” (1876), the former seminarian’s profession of faith in the future of science by way of a Greek miracle. Let us parenthetically relate some defining features of the history of religion as an object of scientific study.
- 8 Ever since the first, distant critical confrontations with “new worlds,” “natural cannibals” and “fetish-gods,” the enlightened minds of philosophers have never ceased reflecting on the origins of religions beyond the Judeo-Christian tradition of their own dominant culture. During the 19th century, orientalism and primitivism, born of Romantic inspiration, progressively led, in both Europe and the United States, to various works of philology, archaeology and comparative mythology with supporting theories of the evolution of civilisations. In France, after the Egyptian expedition (1798-1801) and the discovery of the “Rosetta Stone,” a major step forward in deciphering hieroglyphics, the July Monarchy (1830-1848) was marked by the development of theories and historical and comparative surveys of religions across extended cultural areas. In a context of heightened tensions between the Church and the State, the Third Republic endowed the non-confessional history of religions with its durable academic structure by instituting its first chairs, in particular at the *Collège de France* (1879) and in the 5th section of “Religious Studies” of the EPHE founded in 1886. The scholarly exploration of spatially and temporally distant narratives, laws and ways of living, and historical criticism of the most familiar or folkloric religious traditions soon integrated the conceptual framework of emerging sociology. As early as 1895, Durkheim had a hunch about the impersonal power that governs both the prohibition of incest and the sacred feast through which men, thanks to the sacrifice of a victim, enter into a covenant with their gods. Reactivated at these particularly exuberant moments, a collective force (*mana*) delineates the border between what is permitted and what is prohibited (taboo), gives the group (clan) an identifying symbol (totem) and forges the vocabulary of these categories of thought and action. We are well aware of the epistemological *tour de force* with which the sociologist grasped *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life* (1912) of the Australian Aborigines in order to determine the sociological nature of the term “religious” and situate it at the centre of a theory of sociality and a theory of knowledge. His prototypical approach that, for example, led him to liken aboriginal totems to the national flag, provoked criticism. Historians wondered what became, in this model, of the singular prophetic features that characterised the complex forms of religious life forged by historical monotheisms; anthropologists questioned the unique relation between clan and totem; philosophers argued that the categories of understanding owe as much to the technical necessities of

the exchange of goods as to totemic classifications. The criticism of “sociolatry” rallied the adversaries of a sociological monotheism both among Catholic scholars from the inter-war period and the secular re-founders of the discipline after the Liberation of France.

- 9 During this critical transitional period punctuated by two world wars, the other previously mentioned reference who greatly influenced our Group was Max Weber. One might even suggest that it was thanks to his deep personal depression at the beginning of the 20th century that the brilliant German jurist and economist was able to discover the primitive or savage mind within himself, during those five years suffering from the depths of insomnia, phobias and fears that plagued him. It was precisely this existential crisis that led the future sociologist to go beyond the superficial appearance of reasons and behaviours, to detect the magic and irrationality that go hand in hand with every rational construct of the world, whether theological or scientific. As Isabelle Kalinowski, French translator from the second generation, writes:

To the exhibitionism of scholars seeking lived experiences, Weber contrasts a more secret use of his knowledge of the intricacies of suffering and mortification, which is reminiscent of a magician’s initiation, a hidden but irreplaceable prerequisite for being able to see and detect the mechanisms of practices.⁶

- 10 His therapy was the comparative and frenzied study of the major traditions of salvation that he carried out until his death (Protestantism, ancient Judaism, Confucianism and Taoism, Hinduism and Buddhism) even though he who reconnected with knowledge confessed his insensitivity to “the music of religion.”⁷ If Durkheim discovered the guiding principal of the separation between the profane and the sacred, Weber saw this second polarity as immutable, resistant to the passing of time and noted how rites attempt to retain it through repetition. But it was the propagandists who most supported the economy of salvation by virtue of the differences in their role and status: magicians, priests, prophets and layman assumed various positions and degrees of charisma depending on the situation. Pierre Bourdieu drew his concept of “*champ*” (field) from the interplay of positions and investments between this world and the hereafter. Soon faced with the meaning given to the history of the utopian movements they used as historical fieldwork, some members of the Group, such as Desroche and especially Séguy, did not settle for illustrious predecessors such as Friedrich Engels, author *Peasant War* (1850), or Ernst Bloch who wrote *Thomas Muntzer as Theologian of Revolution* (1921). Like more and more post-war researchers, they found their grammatical rules of sociology in Weberian categories, both in terms of forms of religious communalisation (ecclesiastical, sectarian, reticular) and in vocational arrangements, types of rationality and charisma or elective affinities between ethics and economy.

- 11 This is how the shift, foreseen in the inter-war period, from positively descriptive scientific religious studies (archaeology, philology, history) to an all-encompassing discipline that perceives religion as a “total social fact,” as Marcel Mauss defined it, took shape. The introductory leaflet of the *Archives* in 1956 showcased two historians, Henri-Charles Puech and Paul Vignaux, who in 1937, in their description of the social sciences in France wrote:

It is only in sociology, which in turn uses data from comparative religious studies, that the religious fact can be entirely defined and explained by society and it is only through sociology that religious studies can be included in the social sciences.⁸

- 12 From this text in the frontispiece of the new journal, these even more precise lines must be added:

Not only have sociologists fine-tuned comparativism, made it more methodical, they also, before phenomenology, taught us to think more about the types of religious acts, such as sacrifices and prayers. Their methods drew attention to aspects that were neglected until now, the objective factors of religious life, rites, dogmas, doctrines, and languages. Increasingly, it becomes clear that mysticism itself is not a pure experience, a raw feeling: it implies techniques of expression and theology. In this way, the sociological point of view joins the history of the Church and dogma. Religious studies no longer get lost in a wave of sentiment, or in their explanation, they find consistency in the consistency of their object.⁹

- 13 For the record, the aforementioned promotional leaflet was not circulated because the “boss,” Dean Le Bras, did not give his consent, as he was afraid that its sociological radicalism would offend a part of the prospective ecclesiastical readership.¹⁰ These are some of the paradoxes of the shift in perspective mentioned above, on both an epistemic and interpersonal level.

- 14 Anniversaries often give institutions the opportunity to question what they are and sometimes to build themselves a legitimate history. To celebrate the journal’s fortieth anniversary, François-André Isambert, then retired, concluded his retrospective in this way:

We can understand that in the 1950s building a research team and a journal for the sociology of religions, even though an extension of religious sociology, well-established within French sociology, was a very delicate operation. Contrary to what had happened at the end of the last century when, for reasons of sociological theory and outside organized religions, sociology of religion had taken shape as part of secular movements, it was not clear who, besides religiously motivated figures, could at the time take the initiative to revive this branch of sociology. Of the “leaders,” only Le Bras for Catholicism and Léonard for Protestantism met this requirement. The relationship between Le Bras and Léonard was always excellent and Leonard even contributed to the *Archives*. But Le Bras was more enterprising and met Desroche, without whom nothing would have been accomplished, then the other musketeers.¹¹

- 15 Ten years later, André Mary, at the time senior editor, added in the interrogative form:

Apart from personal friendships, how could any understanding be patent among these Marxist-inspired “sociologists” and Dean Le Bras, a traditional Catholic Breton, well acquainted with God and the devil, a “prince of canon law,” close to the Catholic hierarchy and Rome, and even “councillor for religious affairs” (CAR) at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs? How uneasy was he with an ex-Dominican like Charles-Henri Desroches, separated from the Church and on a quest for a utopian community in the cooperative spirit of Fourier or an Émile Poulat, historian-critic of the Church, bent on reviving the modernist crisis and seriously raising the explosive question of worker-priests? One can ask how these “three musketeers” who comprised the “five fingers of the hand,” along with F. Isambert and J. Maître — all committed people — could be working together on a scientific, objective, positive and descriptive project to forge a sociology of “religious facts,” free from ideological and confessional biases?¹²

Under Gabriel Le Bras’ Wing

- 16 When Le Bras, with his flowery tongue, uttered the iconic expression of “*cinq doigts de la main*” (“five fingers on a hand,” meaning an inseparable group of people), it placed him

at the centre of this enigmatic story. His absence from our group portrait may surprise some and calls for an explanation. There are two reasons. The first concerns the timing of this research: the dean's archives, as extensive as they are, are dispersed among institutes and ministries, his residence in Paris and his family home in Brittany, and only partly compiled at this time. In addition to the autobiographical notes, obituaries and dictionary entries which have been plentiful since his death in 1970, many archives still need to be inventoried for a first biography, one which would reveal the many sides to this man and the extent of his influence on the reconstruction of the social sciences after the Second World War.¹³ The second reason is more fundamental and has possibly been guessed: in addition to the generational gap between the "patron" and his protégés, the latter were not a "group" until their separation from "religious sociology." This separation was initiated by Le Bras in 1930 to move away from a type of sociology of practices of worship that fulfilled a pastoral or missionary vocation rather than an anthropological agenda. On this point André Mary elaborates:

The second paradox is that the founding scientific endeavour of these "sociologists of religion" of the CNRS was "patronised" (and guaranteed) by a master who wasn't really a master, who distrusted "initiators and founders" and preferred "maintainers."¹⁴ His followers always made it clear that the master did not share their enthusiasm for the convictions and expectations of this scientific adventure. Not to mention the patronage of the Protestant law professor É.-G. Léonard, the reformed believer, great historian of Protestantism and director of studies who, according to G. Le Bras' own explanations, did not appreciate sociographic methods at all, even less sociological typologies, and especially feared that this work might "reduce the divine to the human" (*In memoriam*, G. Le Bras, 1961).¹⁵

- 17 In keeping with Durkheim's social morphology and as implemented by Maurice Halbwachs, whom he met at the University of Strasbourg in the 1920s, Le Bras, newly appointed to the Chair of the History of Canon Law at the University of Paris and member of the *Société d'histoire ecclésiastique*, revealed in 1931 his celebrated tripartite distinction among "part-time conformists, troops of bystanders, and migrants, for whom religion is defined by three rites: baptism, marriage, burial" with "churchgoers who go to Mass and receive communion at Easter," "the pious and zealous who belong to associations" and those who "attend Vespers, receive communion every week or every month."¹⁶ In his memoirs, the sociologist Henri Mendras provided a rather picturesque rendition of this moment when the law professor, his "master, in the full sense of the term," set off to do fieldwork in his free time:

With modest financial assistance from Bouglé (on Rockefeller funds), Le Bras roamed France on foot from 1935 to 1939, with his bag and a spare shirt, going from presbytery to presbytery to interview country priests. The rectories of Brittany received him in bourgeois homes and claimed that they saw their entire flock at Church every Sunday, save for a few "hard heads" and "black sheep." In the department of the Creuse, a poor priest in a dilapidated rectory told him that the men did not go inside the church, even for funerals.¹⁷

- 18 It is possible that the memorialist embellished the picture somewhat considering that the idea of counting the number of practising Catholics in the way one does livestock was at first, for its audacious initiator, a long process of recruiting volunteer investigators from the Church, who feared that Christian life would be reduced to a set of numbers and that it would only magnify the country's depressing story of dechristianisation.¹⁸ In one of his many progress reports and demands to expand his small network of investigating clerics, the initiator dreamt of recruiting a learned society, like the mythical "Heptachord" in which he would gather together in one

provincial town: a philosophy professor, a regional archivist, a folklorist, a lawyer who was both a “local historian and bibliophile,” a military man “expert in Roman languages and in foreign politics,” an abbot “school chaplain, doctor in philosophy and theology” and, last but not least, an “honorary law professor,” Mr Bérulle.¹⁹ Recently, Thomas Hirsch summarised this enlightening suggestion as follows:

After the philosopher’s lectures (“Conjectures on the Beliefs of the Rade”) and those of the folklorist (“Sketch of Prehistory of the Heruntos”), both subsequently associated with sociology, the jurist invited the company to draw attention to “a country located between the 42nd and 52nd degree,” where “forty-two million people live, and no one knows their religious customs.” This was a good opportunity to once again present the reasons, the means, some results and the purpose of the investigation but above all to present and answer the various scholarly or religious objections it raised. Bérulle provided some preliminary results and announced his views on the state of practices and of Christianisation in the country, emphasising that twelve devout souls can represent “a wealth of faith bigger than the hundreds of regulars who attend Mass as a social event” and highlighting, after the ground lost for religious practice during the Revolution and then again, at the advent of the Third Republic, a “general recovery of vitality,” should be examined and its various “signs” determined. The jurist was sure to win over the audience: “For two hours, my dear Bérulle, there are no longer any believers or non-believers, sceptics or dogmatists, Greeks or Romans among us, only men who have transferred their passion to knowledge, and who only wish to know how to better share their enthusiasm, allay worries and concerns or simply understand the human conscience.”²⁰

- 19 In his third incarnation, for which the name Bérulle is vividly remembered (after Pierre de Bérulle (1575-1629), the famous philosopher cardinal of the Incarnate Word and founder of the *Société de l’Oratoire*, the provincial jurist of the heptachord), he continued to incubate his idea of determining the social origin of rules and their effect on society. His former students noted his fondness for the tangible:

Beyond figures and statistics, the “quality” of religious people interested him: how they attended services was more important than their presence alone. What solidarity is there between an attentive worshipper who prays and sings, and a sleepy shepherd or frolicking jester?²¹

Thus, G. Le Bras could see the sexual approach in these services where the men were separated from the women, but where young men threw pellets onto the necks of young girls. Brassens would have put it into song. G. Le Bras found it significant and salient among his collection of field observations. For him, the typology was a constant concern, something he inherited from the Durkheimian school.²²

- 20 The person who collected observations and mobilised the good-willed volunteer participants in dioceses also walked in the footsteps of André Siegfried who, through the electoral statistics from before the World War I, had discovered that in Vendée “granite gave the priest and limestone the teacher,” devout farmland on one side, fertile and dechristianised plains on the other.²³ But other influences still governed the canonist’s keen interest in the geographical history of religious practices. Like his colleague from Strasbourg, Marc Bloch, Le Bras was smitten with collective psychology as taught by Ignace Meyerson. In his ambitious text *Introduction à l’histoire de la pratique religieuse en France* (1942), Le Bras wrote:

Collective attitudes: social causes. If a huge majority of rural people from non-Breton speaking Brittany attend Sunday Mass whereas churches in the Creuse where they speak the *marchois* dialect are empty, if the bourgeois holds onto the seasonal solemnities whereas the labourer neglects them, this contrast cannot be

explained by individual choice or divine whim. The answer can be found in social science.²⁴

- 21 During the 1930s, “the heptachord” gradually spread nationwide, with support from the Rockefeller Foundation, it enrolled various learned societies, some Catholic groups, the *Société du folklore français*, and other small groups that practiced a surviving version of the Durkheimian tradition.²⁵ Here is how the then recruiter recalled and belatedly recounted in 1966 in the *Archives* his encounter with the *Institut français de sociologie* in 1935:

The audience (where many academics met) pictured itself as a cult in a chapel with its dogmas, its limits and its vanity. How many times have I recorded this legend from masters, learned and good! In reality, I met a welcoming group, without prejudices, whose only concern was to contribute to the development of sociology. A “*tala*” [in the ENS students’ slang, *tala* defines those who go to Mass, “ceux qui vont à la messe”] breathed as easily as an agnostic. Mauss, our patriarch, knew everything, thanks to his charisma, and distributed his gifts without expecting a counter-gift. The meditation continued with Halbwachs’ infinite modesty, which made him a supernatural being. Finely cultured, Bouglé’s exquisite kindness, Granet’s powerful and austere mind, and Massignon’s generous prophetism seduced us. Simiand understood the mathematics of the gods, Henri Lévy-Bruhl understood their legal tricks and revealed the riches of their kindness.²⁶

- 22 After World War II, the learned networker held many posts and responsibilities in different sectors. The second office officer during the “Twilight War” became the leader of the French Resistance student movement (Front national universitaire, FNU) and narrowly escaped the clutches of the Gestapo in 1942 (according to the citation he received with the medal for his contribution to the Resistance in 1947). The affable fifty-year-old, who was able to resist compromising offers made by the Vichy regime and gave an emotional welcome speech for the leader of Free France in 1945 at the reopening of the Sorbonne, accumulated presidencies, chairs and committees in the singularly broad political-academic post-war context. He was connected with both the 5th and 6th sections of the EPHE, the *Institut d’études politiques*, the board of the CNRS, assumed the deanship of the law school, the presidency of the *Société d’histoire de l’Église*, acted as councillor for religious affairs at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and advisor on the national committee of the France-USSR Association, close to communist circles.²⁷ Once a term that had been used sparingly and according to the context of diverse audiences, “sociology” then became a flag to wave, for him and for many others. This empirical science of the human world was meant to defy various dogmatisms, whether coming from Marxism or techno-liberalism, or, moreover, from the limitations of traditional theology. In one of his many post-war professions of faith, Le Bras, whom the Rockefeller Foundation called one of the two rising stars of social science in France (with Lucien Febvre),²⁸ presented his programme of “religious sociology,” including the history of canon law and placing the search for complex forms of modern “religious vitality” in the continuation of the elementary forms of religion theorised by Durkheim while studying the Australian Aboriginals.²⁹ In this respect, his call for an investigation, consistent with the influential American empiricism of the time, was no less resistant to the relegation of Durkheimian theory to the rank of “sterile and paralysing sociological phlogiston theory,” as Jean Stoetzel was no longer afraid to put it on the very site of the Bordeaux chair of the great ancestor.³⁰ But once France was occupied by Germany, his previous efforts to recruit investigators were echoed and managed by Catholic Action, then in the midst of a missionary awakening.³¹ His encounter with

Canon Fernand Boulard, national chaplain of the Catholic Agricultural Youth, in 1944, was decisive in this endeavour. This unparalleled organiser was able to provide research outcomes during the *Trente Glorieuses*, the post-war boom years, by surrounding himself with dozens of associates. Today, the sociologist Alain Chenu notes:

From 1946 to 1966, studies of regular Catholic practices concerned around ten million people. From 1946 to 1970, surveys organised during Sunday Mass affected more than four million worshippers. Apart from official statistics, such vast investigations have never been carried out in France, and this record is still unbeaten.³²

- 23 One of the most spectacular outcomes of this endeavour was the innovative mapping of the varied intensity of religious practice in France, which the historian François Furet praised in these terms:

I met Canon Boulard a few years before his death while it so happened I was studying the history of literacy in France. At the time, of his work, I only knew of the famous map of religious practice in the middle of the 20th century, which is one of the most powerful and mysterious documents on France and its history: a very devout West, from Mayenne to Finistère and from Vendée to Cotentin; a dechristianised central area that sweeps across the country from the Landes to the Ardennes, including the North-West of the Massif Central and all of the Parisian Basin; in contrast, an arc of strong religious practice that goes from the Pays Basque to Alsace, following the south and south-east curves of the Massif Central. This roughly tripartite division of the national territory, the discovery of a lifetime of scientific work, poses many questions, and such varying questions, to so many researchers, that it represents both a central enigma and a catalogue of enigmas³³.

- 24 However, as Poulat emphasised, the no less spectacular decline of Catholic practice in the middle of the 1960s highlighted the “paradoxical destiny” of the studies that Le Bras produced with Boulard which “was to introduce the Christian people of France into the history of the Church at a time when, more and more, their history was diverging.”³⁴ It was in this gap that “the other sociology” was born, one that was less geographical and more historical-anthropological, and which Le Bras introduced into the CNRS by encouraging the recruitment of researchers. Aware that religious vitality could not be reduced to what was observable in more or less misleading manifestations, in the post-war period, Le Bras never stopped travelling the continents, not only as an eminent representative of the French University but also as an attentive observer of Buddhist and Islamic communities and other syncretisms around the world. In calling upon Desroche’s team and their unifying research programme, the history of the group began in earnest, though not without some inevitable initial divisiveness.
- 25 In the programmatic document he wrote for the first issue of the *Archives* (1956), Le Bras defined the field of study of sociology of religion as “the structure and life of organised groups for whom the sacred is the beginning and the end” and even more precisely to the “communional” aspect of the phenomenon, delegating the “supernatural” aspect to theology. Not long before, in his preface to Boulard’s *Premiers itinéraires en sociologie religieuse* (1954), he again specified the limit not to be exceeded on the Catholic side of religious sociology: “There are some areas that Catholics abstain from exploring: that of the Revelation. Because if the myths of archaic peoples are an invention, an explication, a replica (or even a hypostasis) of the tribe or clan, Christian mysteries are a dictation from God to Man, who merely translates it into his own language.”³⁵ Putting aside its antiquated neo-colonial connotations, this sentence has

often been quoted to distinguish between a “religious sociology,” self-limited by the Augustinian theology of divine grace irreducible to human activities and a “sociology of religion” that postulates the methodological and reflexive reduction of all creation of supernatural beings and worlds to a social fact *hic et nunc*, outside of any anti-religious predisposition.

- 26 In the same inaugural issue of the *Archives*, at the instigation of Desroche, every article was devoted to the work of the recently deceased sociologist Joachim Wach (1898-1955). Wach was a German researcher who emigrated to Chicago during the Nazi regime and who situated his approach to religion within the dual heritage of Lutheran theology and German phenomenology, two intellectual currents that tend to distinguish religious feeling and its symbolic forms. Based on this dual tension, dating back to Friedrich Schleiermacher, and later Ernst Troeltsch and Rudolf Bultmann, Desroche moved the abstract border between communion and supernatural worlds, according to Le Bras, towards the more historical play between religious experience and expression, one serving the other and vice-versa. And so, for twenty or so years, he debated with his colleagues on the team and on the international stage about the hermeneutic circle according to which, on the one hand, experience is misunderstood when the focus is solely on expression and, on the other, expression is underestimated when excessive attention is given to spiritual experience. It was not in theology that he searched for an answer but rather in anthropology which, moreover, provided him with a language and grammar. Claude Lévi-Strauss, commenting on Marcel Mauss, came to the rescue of the debate, by apprehending the relationship with the religious object in the same way as any other ethnological investment:

An appropriate understanding of a social fact requires that it be grasped totally, that is, from outside, like a thing; but like a thing which comprises within itself the subjective understanding (conscious or unconscious) that we would have of it, if, being inexorably human, we were living the fact as indigenous people instead of observing it as ethnographers. The problematic thing is to know how it is possible to fulfil that ambition, which does not consist only of grasping an object from outside and inside simultaneously, but also requires much more; for the insider's grasp (that of the indigenous person, or at least that of the observer reliving the indigenous person's experience) needs to be transposed into the language of the outsider's grasp, providing certain elements of a whole which, to be valid, has to be presented in a systematic and coordinated way³⁶.

- 27 It is, therefore, a matter of translation where understanding is challenged by cultural otherness. There is a difference in tone, reference and finality distinguishable from an accounting of practices according to “emic” categories of pastoral purpose which is obvious here. It must be pointed out that this largely took place at a time of competition between regenerative utopias, such as Marxism or Personalism, which nevertheless undermined the backlash of a post-war guilty conscience. If the epistemic self-limitation of pastoral investigations of religious practices opened up new avenues for the sociology team at the CNRS, Le Bras' patronage, however, was not straightforward concerning the critical endeavour he had put into motion. Perhaps expecting the first issue of the *Archives* to be negatively received by clerics who had already been very divided since the powerful Vatican condemnation of worker-priests, Le Bras withdrew at the same time, in 1956, from his responsibilities with the journal and from the *Centre catholique de sociologie religieuse*, created in 1952 as an echo chamber for pastoral investigations, evoking his fatigue and his desire to carry out his projects on the history of the Church and canon law.³⁷ The subsequent deconfessionalisation of

this Centre, like that of many learned societies which founded the current secular associations of social sciences of religion in the United States and Europe, did not occur without opposition: indeed sociology was sometimes branded as the new anticlerical theology.³⁸ Until the 1970s, at least, the pioneers of the GSR undertook their overwhelming task of re-founding a specialised discipline that had never really existed before and which, unlike other branches of sociology, as mentioned above, did not quite meet society's demand in a country under reconstruction and in which secularisation remained conflictual. The Group's collective enterprise was its own instrument, the journal, and especially its bibliographical bulletin which, based on the model of the pre-World War I journal *L'Année sociologique*, published reviews of everything written worldwide on religion in the name of rational knowledge (*i.e.*, Western scholarship).³⁹ The bibliometrics of the first twenty years demonstrate the exceptional productivity of this small team. Not only did they write for its thematic network but they also strove to be present and influential in other social science journals that were being created in France at the time.⁴⁰ Before going further into the specifics of the publication, let us touch on an affectionate moment when the patron and his protégés were separated, as expressed in this letter of apology that the former wrote to the latter in 1968 when he was not able to attend their meeting due to a bad case of the flu which kept him in bed:

I will perhaps express better in writing my feelings towards your Group. First, admiration for your exemplary work, your youthful passion for research, your thoughtfulness towards elders; the pleasure of witnessing the development of a science to which I once made a small contribution: as I recently wrote to the director of the CNRS, you turned modest empirical research into science, with modern techniques — and with such objectivity! — and as I had hoped, you have forged alliances with all sciences and ultimately friendships, which have developed with those of you with whom I have had the opportunity to meet often. Need I say that I would do anything a retired man can do for your group — a model of fraternal teamwork — and for each one of you? I look forward to our collaboration as one of the pleasures of my old age.⁴¹

The Object and the Motive

- 28 This productive team's minority status increased the need to legitimize its fundamental object of study, which had been ambivalent since its founding at the same time as French sociology in the early century. This ambiguous object was one reason the sociology of religion remained on the fringes of social science post-war reconstruction programmes. The shared destiny of our five recruits explains why our cohorts chose to live their lives dedicated to research. Despite intellectual trajectories that did not really converge, as will be seen later, their attachment to the journal they developed and distributed internationally by expanding the number of correspondents, authors and readers, created common ground amongst the members. Some external features might qualify the group as defectors from other teams: their critical experience of Christianity, a certain proximity to left-wing Catholicism (with the exception of Ségué), the absence of an initiation by way of travel to the United States, balanced out by a commitment to intense international exchanges, the division of labour between quantitative approaches (Isambert and Maître) and qualitative approaches but without experience in ethnographical or long-term participant observation (with the possible exception of Poulat, who nonetheless had such experience given his lifelong dialogue

with the Catholic Church), the historical approach at the heart of each researcher's work, the reflexive distance from hegemonic paradigms such as Marxism or structuralism, the intersection of multiple sociological traditions excluding ethnomethodology and symbolic interactionism (except perhaps for Isambert with his pragmatic approach to the symbolic efficiency of rites). Thus, when one looks for external features shared by the initial core group of a team that diversified through many recruitments, individualities crop up. International reports on the institutionalisation of sociology of religion do not mention "schools" in the French case.⁴²

- 29 For a while, Desroche's enterprising charisma established a spirit of collegiality and created a shared sensitivity with the genealogy of utopias from which social sciences originated. Thus, precursory research studies on workers' associations in the mid-twentieth century were organised (Owen, Saint-Simon, Fourier, Buchez, etc.) within the framework of the *Centre de recherches coopératives* (6th section of the EPHE), the Group's parent structure. However, like many post-war re-foundations, the recognition of a discipline as a speciality depended on the construction of unique, if not competing, bodies of research. Daily life in a laboratory equipped with a journal, with all its technical and administrative imperatives as well as conflicts over the attribution of positions of academic authority, were enough to somewhat undermine the initial bonds of solidarity. When Desroche left in the early 1970s, Poulat took over to manage the increasing organisational requirements of an expanding laboratory. Séguy, who withdrew at the same time, was replaced by Isambert to recapture the vacant chair of "religious sociology" bequeathed to the 6th section of the EPHE by Le Bras. Likewise, at the end of this important decade, Poulat was on the verge of having a heart attack during a memorable laboratory assembly where Isambert and his colleagues Paul Ladrière and Jean-Paul Terrenoire declared "secession" by creating a new laboratory dedicated to the sociology of ethics, urged on by the public protests about abortion and test-tube babies.
- 30 In the 1960s, the collective was initially centred around the socio-historical investigations at the heart of social utopias of the 19th century, messianic movements in Africa and Latin America, Protestant dissidences and the secularisation of Catholicism. This collective developed in a laboratory on the fence between the CNRS, the EHESS and the EPHE, with thematic teams concentrating on previous traditions but also on Judaism, Islam and charismatic revivals around the world. At the beginning of the 1980s, after the Shiite uprising in Iran and the election of the new pope (John Paul II), the artisan of the collapse of communism, religious symbolism began to reappear in politics. With the 1990s, promising to be the decade of the "revenge of God,"⁴³ the multi-team, multi-network laboratory underwent a decisive mutation by its reconfiguration into two mixed research units. It was at this time, as mentioned above, that our pioneers retired and passed the baton onto their "successors," namely Danièle Hervieu-Léger who created the *Centre d'études interdisciplinaires du religieux* at the EHESS (1993), focussing on the manifestations of religious modernity at a time of the individualisation of belief, and Jean Baubérot who created the *Groupe Sociologie, Religions et Laïcités* at the EPHE (1995), researching the institutional processes of the secularisation of societies on every continent. This division of work was not without occasional tensions but the shared journal remained the main meeting place and site of confrontation for programmes, disciplines and methods beyond the blended

laboratories. The progressive introduction of double blind peer review, and the periodical election of editorial and scientific committees (with their network of international correspondents) reflects a definitive departure from the era of charisma and of likeminded, close-knit researchers sharing knowledge and similar origins. Mirroring the major redevelopment within the social sciences, the history and anthropology of the here and the elsewhere, of the present and the past, progressively gained on sociology during the previous few years whereas political science, still in high demand due to the religious context, tended to abandon academic circles in favour of broader public audiences.

- 31 To return to our subject, our initiators, it was rather by indirect means, that is to say by finding variable solutions to the problem of a sociological object too closely connected to the very existence of each person, that the group effect could be found. These were more or less explicit discursive solutions, depending on the cases or implicit, less verbal resolutions and a series of empirical choices made along the various trajectories within the evolving intellectual field. During a conference that has left its mark on our academic community since the beginning of the 1980s, Bourdieu tried to clarify this complex relationship with the object by using an evocative chiasmus, “sociologists of belief and beliefs of sociologists.”⁴⁴ The inclusion of religion in the history of a society that refers to it as a belief as fundamental as it is individual and tacit, tends to create a gap between researchers who are believers or are religious and those who are not. The former are tempted to make people understand without explaining, the latter are tempted to explain without understanding. Hence the possible double standards of those who accumulated the combined benefits of theological knowledge and the sociological method, the whole combined into a type of edifying science. The *Collège de France* professor therefore suggested that his colleagues carry out the socio-analysis of their existential relationship with the object in order to make a well-considered decision all the while encouraging them to study traditions outside their own culture. Circumstances meant that, for Desroche and Séguy, from the outset, investigating Protestantism with its messianisms and cascaded denominations established itself as an estrangement from a personal history too strongly influenced by the doubts and the drawbacks of being devoted Catholics. Focused on a life-saving utopia that moves mountains or excites communities of volunteers and virtuosos, religion as an object of study was articulated in terms of comparative knowledge between imaginary constructions that defy the passage of time by drawing the symbolic force of a vision of the future from the golden age of the past. This was evidently not the case for the remaining three musketeers who cultivated the Catholic garden of their own culture. But their quest to maintain the proper distance from their object of study differed greatly from one path to another.
- 32 Poulat was undoubtedly the one who explored the intricate mysteries of the Catholic institution the most, all the while explaining the reasons for his desire for knowledge the least. His harsh criticism of pastoral sociology appears to have originally been his first smokescreen. This is how he was behind one of the most vicious attacks against the thesis of “cultural regions” that, in Canon Boulard’s well-known maps, would explain the long-term territorial variations of religious practices. In a debate staged by the *Archives* in 1970, he accused “sociographists” of underestimating the correlation between worker density and dechristianisation and, in contrast, of overestimating the link between pastoral activity and Church attendance, which justified the investigation. His insistence on promoting social change as a main variable at the expense of related

variables such as the history of territories and of their “pastoration” was connected to his deep disappointment with the dechristianisation of the working class. Poulat was a former comrade of the worker-priest movement and a future life-long theorist of Catholic intransigence. On the other hand, as highlighted by Chenu concerning the “ruse of reason,” the set of variables revealed by the statistician Canon served as a serious hypothesis to answer the questions posed by historian François Furet, fascinated by a map that was a first and undoubtedly global hapax. Late in life, willingly allowing himself to be pushed to his autobiographical limits as a sociologist and historian who had hidden his past as a rebellious priest, Poulat invoked the light of Bachelard’s *Flamme d’une chandelle* (1961) where dreams coexist with reason: “Because unity is first and foremost within us, in the powers of the soul, not in an elusive capacity for intellectual synthesis between the rational and the irrational. These powers that continuously propel man forward and above himself.”⁴⁵

- 33 Poulat had apparently nothing in common with Isambert who, even though he had as a teenager succumbed to a missionary impulse while feeling the fervour of the *Témoignage chrétien* camps in the midst of the *Débâcle*, had done much to mobilise the Durkheimian and Weberian traditions to give meaning to the social and institutional fabric running through every sacramental gesture and every metaphysical experience. Fuelled by Plato, Descartes and Husserl, his bedside authors, the philosopher who became a sociologist out of his longing for history and for anchoring himself in reality, translated the dilemmas or the ruses of reason into a series of varied perspectives on the world. Again late in life, Isambert, who had quit Catholicism as a sociological field and promising horizon for the development of a new genealogy of bioethics, considered that it was not simply a transfer of spheres connected to the secularisation of the world, but a shift in focus from one regime to another of coexisting representations and practices. It was up to sociologists to demonstrate the concrete multiplicity of the articulations between systems of “profuse propositions,” if only to explain the metaphysical ingredients of public debate around the moral status of human life.
- 34 In addition to this resolute perspectivism, the case of Maître illustrates, through his journey, the power of the passage of time which revolutionises points of view. Maître, in an overdue dialogue with Bourdieu, confessed, once he had retired, that at the start of his career he had over-used social mathematics because he refused to tackle religion even though it was part of his own childhood, reviewed the benefits of his psychoanalysis which he credited for having taken him back to the heart of Christian mystique-turned object.⁴⁶ As this historic dialogue suggests, Maître did not only vanquish classic misgivings towards an object tainted with illegitimacy since its discipline rose up against theology, but he took a closer look at the very heart of the dialectic between psychic economy and the dynamic of institutions. Thus, for example, the “small voice” of Thérèse de Lisieux, youthful figure of the gift of oneself to the feminised divine mercy (“Jesus my mother”), is in line with both the frustration of her desire to have children and the great history of a country at war where the Church resisted its marginalisation by giving meaning to the various expiatory impulses after the defeat in 1870 and the dramatic episode of the Commune. Appointed guardian of French and German soldiers during the World War I, the rapidly canonised Saint ensured that, on a smaller scale, the Order of the Carmelites was successful within the Roman hierarchy.

- 35 For his part, Bourdieu, undeniably present in our story, confessed to having suffered for too long from the tacit prohibition inflicted by his discipline towards everything that stems from metaphysics and enviously acknowledged the “provocative” field opened up by his colleague Maître. Incidentally, *mutatis mutandis*, his secondary finding that “there are subjects that we do not broach” is strangely echoed in a reverse axiology to Le Bras’ injunction of circumstances according to which “there are sectors that Catholics forbid themselves from exploring” (*supra*). A series of epistemological obstacles and attempts at overcoming these eventually ended these two taboos separated by almost half a century. This is why it is still so important at present to retrace step by step the paths taken by each of our explorers as they broke down barriers or crossed boundaries.
- 36 Indeed, following the ways and means taken to redefine a sociologically provocative object reveals, *en passant*, another question that torments the field: that of the relationship with the institution, whether it be in the form of an ecclesiastical or academic authority. This was obvious for Desroche, Poulat and Ségué who each clashed more or less violently with the Catholic hierarchy, albeit at very different points of time in their lives. Son of a labourer from a district of Roanne (Loire, central France), Desroche, like many other good students from the rural working classes, found salvation within the parish and the parochial school system. The ecclesiastical institution allowed for dreaming of elsewhere, something well worth the task of self-formatting that it dictated. The slightly rebellious altar boy who became the leader of movements, editor and spiritual activist within the Dominican order, had a more significant encounter with the institution when his work on the exegesis of Marxism decidedly rubbed the Holy Office the wrong way. Desroche had since childhood dedicated his life to writing, following the example of great authors like Claudel or Sartre. He left behind a significant collection of public and unpublished works, some philosophical, others poetic, all of which seem to express the experience of cutting off from one world or another as a main theme. Tested by the return to a secular state, Desroche, who had been so affected by the Church as an institution, rediscovered a form of self-control in the scriptural gesture. “The shadow of Montaigne” said Duvignaud (*supra*). This explains his compulsive journaling, a type of writing that helped many clerics in “reviewing their lives” and acquiring a substitute language, such as that of the humanities.⁴⁷ Each inhabited state of life redistributes its repertoire of associations and derived filiations. This was true for the priests and their orders, in particular for one of the more distinguished figures of the time, Father Louis-Joseph Lebrét who expanded the field of cooperation beyond partisan rifts in order to bring intelligence to troubled times. Likewise, after the Vatican’s condemnation, there was a transition to the “secular monastery of science” with its new figures of “people excluded from the hoard” such as Georges Gurvitch or Georges Friedmann, but also the protector Le Bras. Another networker, like Le Bras, Desroche travelled the world, distanced from hierarchies. “With Bastide” he explored, in a collegial endeavour, the messianic or millenarian upheavals which uplift the imagination. His dialectic of the *sic et non* however left open the word play between the “logies” (theo and socio) as his academic background was likewise divided between religion and cooperation, research and action. Faced with the institution of language and its various categories, the written word kept the researcher walking a tightrope over the “boundary sickness” that plagued him, as shown here by André Mary.

- 37 This ailment affected Poulat differently as he spent his life working as a stowaway at the disciplinary intersections of ecclesiology, history and sociology. His funeral service at the Saint Severin church in the heart of the Latin Quarter of Paris revealed through its academic turnout and the presiding archbishop from Rome the clearest institutional anchoring of all his colleagues, though he had for a lifetime scrutinised the flaws and dramas of the Church seemingly condemned by History. His crepuscular and prolific work was distinguished by its evermore incisive ethno-historical undertones in examining the uncompromising stature of a multi-secular institution that, in its foretold disaster, bequeathed nonetheless its patterns of thought and action to the present. However, as demonstrated by Yvon Tranvouez in the manner of Jacques Le Goff dealing with his Saint Louis (that the individual exists only in a network of diversified social relationships, this diversity being precisely what allows him to develop his game), the notoriety of his extensive work originated from the circles of secant collaborations within an “ecclesiosphere” with a broad political scope as well as from different social science disciplines the author drew from within academic spaces. If Desroche, after some confrontation between cultural anthropology and the intelligence of religious faith, gladly turned towards the figure of Jacob hobbling in the early morning after his night-time wrestle with the angel,⁴⁸ Poulat through his denials of belonging to the Church became more of a Nicodemus, as secret as he was efficient, covert scientist for some, Vatican henchman for others.
- 38 With Séguy the tension with the institution intensifies. The precocious orphan of a devout mother, buffeted around colonial dependencies following a father who was no longer the same, Séguy in turn found salvation in Catholic schools. Nonetheless, his ascetic and radical attitude got him evicted from the Company to which he had turned. As shown by Danièle Hervieu-Léger, a close friend who retraced his journey step by step, from his truncated Juniorate to his science of deviations and escapes to the desert, including his suffering as a professor of languages, his entire career was characterised by the “impossible compromise” with the institution. “Being in this world without being of this world” also pushed him towards Desroche, who in turn took him under his wing and helped him gain notoriety as an international specialist of Christian non-conformisms.
- 39 The five lives of the researchers gathered here retrace the paths and spaces travelled by each individual by accounting for the more or less successful encounters between a budding disciplinary specialization and a problematic object in the context of the general growth of social sciences. Each “musketeer” or “archbishop” tried, to varying degrees and at various times, to recount their own research experience. Some more or less engaged texts remain, some with more “involved” knowledge that goes beyond the respective boundaries between analysis and comprehension or between sociology and theology. Besides the attempts at autobiographies, either indirect ones like Poulat’s *L’ère postchrétienne* (1994), or more often in the form of interviews like Desroche’s *Mémoires d’un faiseur de livres* (1992), the self-analyses published in collections of articles, or in private diaries and epistolary exchanges gave rise to the present parallel reconstitution of individual trajectories. Before beginning this collective work, Isambert set out a few methodological rules, after having assembled his writings himself which, over a period of forty or so years had moved from the sociology of religion to the sociology of ethics. For Isambert, “an anamnesis is not a simple reminder of the past: extracting the former leads to restructuring the latter.”⁴⁹ It is a

matter of severing the common thread of the past to reorganise the elements that give it meaning in the present

Portraits Put to the Test

- 40 In the second decade of the 21st century, the “last of the Mohicans,” as Isambert liked to say, disappeared. The landscape and challenges of the social sciences were obviously no longer the same as those of the bygone era of legitimising religion as an object of study in the context of the growth and institutionalisation of sociology. At least two initial trends were affirmed in tandem. On one hand, there had been a shift from accumulating statistics to practices of worship to interpreting beliefs or “beliefs in practice” (“*croire en acte*”) in a society of secularised individuals. On the other, influenced by cultural globalisation, there was a broadening of the scope of traditions and faiths being researched and explored in their transnational spaces. In the 1990s, the surge of political conflicts putting democratic norms and principles of secularism to the test of intentionally forced religious references significantly moved the cursor of disciplines towards political science and anthropology, all the while confirming the central place of religious history. The epistemic aspirations of post-war sociology as synthetic knowledge, both empirical and critical, were no longer in line with the banal institutionalisation of thematic fields. Despite the relative fragmentation of our initiators’ paths, their successors, born during the post-war population boom, were nonetheless successful in making religion an object of a specialised field, through seminars, programmes and associations, despite an ill-disposed academic environment. The oxymoron “religious modernity” was at the heart of these debates and investigations, during which the national enclave of specialists found support and set up a cooperative network with European and North and South American partnerships. We are indebted to these successors who structured theories and methods through manuals and dictionaries in which they attempt to redefine the object after Durkheim increased significantly. This effort to maintain a scholarly tradition paradoxically operated outside any tangible social demand, unlike what happened after the destruction of the Twin Towers in 9/11 and a series of so-called “Islamic” attacks that impacted the West. In other words, the proprietary space and position of the religious object significantly expanded in that it became both a threat to ward off and a heritage to preserve as well as the source of erudition, expertise, reporting and prophecy. This made the struggle for the separation from the Church, for which some of our re-founders fought in the past, appear rather dated. It is precisely during the unfolding of this new political context for research that the discipline is being passed down to the third generation today. What was established in the concepts wrought by the successors of the post-war re-founders act as a backdrop for research experiences using diverse disciplinary references that do not settle for adopting formerly dominant functionalist perspectives of religion as a specific authority or sphere of social action or knowledge.⁵⁰ Hence there is great interest in genealogical initiatives, such as this reconstruction of significant trajectories.
- 41 This endeavour is not an isolated case, as many within this specialist field and, more generally, within the social sciences, have made reflexivity the focus of their protocols, *i.e.*, exercises in “ego-history” for the accreditation to supervise research (*habilitation à diriger des recherches*, HDR). Exercises are, however, more useful when the relationship

with the object interferes, closely or confusedly, as seen above, with the existence of the subject. After these autobiographical snippets about their masters, the successors, declaring themselves “baby-boomers” on both sides of the Atlantic, subscribed here and elsewhere to this reflexive exercise in impressive collective works that suggest temporally typical causalities.⁵¹ Similarly, other recurring or interfering models portray researchers’ trajectories: an event that occurred as a child or youth can determine a particular sensitivity that is replicated as an interest in knowledge, in the choice of a vocation or type of research; or conversely, entry into the specialist field seems to result from circumstances that followed on from each other according to a random dynamic; or finally, every act seems to follow and reproduce a career plan that fits within the framework of updating a learned tradition.⁵² The first model appears to have been shared by our post-war pioneers whereas the other two models instead describe their successors. It is probably here that the additional variable of gender must be introduced, as the second and especially the third generations are clearly part of the feminisation of social sciences on all continents. More than in gender studies where the personal commitment factor is structuring, the effects of this recent transformation on the course of religious knowledge remain to be studied. In any case, this also dates our post-war sample of the society of men who for a long time epitomized the power of knowledge. In fact, close attention must be paid to the various roles played by the women close to the intellectual lives detailed herein. These women acted as catalysts in transitioning clerics to seculars, as scholar’s collaborators, career partners, and guardians of the memory of the deceased.

42 In any case, the authors of the portraits drawn here fall within the regime of gender mixity that has become common in the field. More importantly, Danièle Hervieu-Léger is the only close witness of the first team, which she then came to direct, expanding the horizons of the initial laboratory. She initially defended her thesis on communities of Christian student protesters in 1968, under Desroche’s supervision and seconded by Séguy, tireless leader of the team of Christian dissidents in the world. In particular, she is the sociologist responsible for renewing the sociological definition of religion as “a practical and symbolic ideological device, by which the (individual and collective) consciousness of belonging to a particular set of beliefs (*lignée croyante*) is incorporated, maintained, developed and controlled.”⁵³ This redefinition led to many research programmes on all continents and made Hervieu-Léger a leading player in the field in question here. Legatee of the archives and works of her master and friend, Séguy, she made no secret of her apprehension about embarking on this biographical adventure driven by a feeling of indebtedness to the memory of a person who was particularly complex and secretive and to whom she had been deeply attached. Her search for a “red line” that could explain a singularly non-conformist path in the discipline is less revisionist than a broader questioning of values, implicit in every area of study. The dimension of gender as a field of values naturalised in the body, attitudes and judgements, is evident in this comment.

43 Céline Béraud, who belongs to the third generation, situates her career as a sociologist of gender relations within Catholicism, as had Hervieu-Léger who initiated her and whom she succeeded as Director of Studies. Admittedly, she did not know Maître when he was alive, though she recounts his stunning epistemic journey and the connections she encountered while unravelling the threads of a life full of hardships concealed under the guise of an outstanding research organiser. For his part, Yvon Tranvouez, historian of Christian progressivism, all the while reconstructing the puzzle of his

thesis supervisor Poulat's verbose work, also serves as witness but in the historical branch of a multifaceted posterity. The anthropologist André Mary, who got a glimpse of Desroche as a member of his jury at his thesis defence on the "worship of vision" of the Bwiti Fang of Gabon and its syncretism, and then saw him again during a workshop on Roger Bastide, did not conceal his emotion when, a quarter of a century later, he found himself in the same mythical meeting place, a "garage" filled with the archives and writings of one about whom he strives less to unravel the evident enigma than to explicate the bonds that connect him to a life of research interspersed with multiple constitutional separations. I am the only author of this portrait whose personal journey, which can be classified as sociology of knowledge, only marginally and belatedly joined the religious field. Undoubtedly, my position as an outsider is not unrelated to my quiet work coordinating the workshop that produced our biographical stories. My encounter with Isambert, at the end of his life, was also overdue but two years of intense and frequent contact with him and his wife, Viviane Isambert-Jamati (1924-2019), one of the first and rare women sociologists in the post-war period, somewhat made up for this. Long before my discovery of religious sciences, the diversity of Isambert's contributions introduced him to me as a particularly abrasive spirit, especially through his criticism of the "strong programme" in sociology of sciences.⁵⁴ Less to solve an existential enigma or to honour an intellectual debt, I set about retracing his long and rich journey as a colleague of the most distinguished names in the field in order to reflect on the general transformations of knowledge in light of the intellectual and political circumstances that unfolded during the second half of the 20th century. I also discovered the torments of an internal life struggle with repercussions that stimulate as much as they paralyse a body of work that is, according to its author, made of "bits and pieces."

- 44 In *Devenir sociologue. Histoires de vie et choix théoriques* (2009), Jean-Philippe Bouilloud, in the role of clinician, studied thirty of so life itineraries in order to understand the connection between personal history and intellectual history. It mainly concerned sociologists close to ours and who also refounded the discipline after the war.⁵⁵ The circumstances and necessities of an intellectual journey, the reconstruction of an inchoate discipline, the objects pursued and the flow of paradigms are some of the themes that create histories. Among other conclusions, the analyst put forward the idea of "parthenogenesis" characterising the course of the researchers' lives as expressed in the first person:

To do sociology is to fight against oneself and for oneself: against oneself because one must tear away from original predispositions, leave and distance oneself from one's roots. For oneself, this means to fight to give meaning to one's life and history, to create and with this recreate oneself, until self-foundation, but also to share one's views of the world, to become known to those from whom one expects or hopes for a favourable judgement, even to train others, set an example, leave one's mark and work.⁵⁶

- 45 The lives depicted herein have been grouped together due to a certain initial community of destiny. They diversely translate this dual movement of personal detachment from the grip of one's original condition and of the progressive construction of a work intended to exceed the time and person of its author. In turn, undertaking this biographical work has been meant to give meaning to the on-going classification of boxes of archives and remediating unsuccessful autobiographical attempts made by the deceased authors. Biographical perspective must distance itself

from its own attachments to the path in question and must avoid any celebration or tribute. This results in various cases: the “impossible compromise” with the institution, the tension between “margins and involvement,” “boundary sickness,” the “joints and breaks” of thought. Many titles summarise the ups and downs of a life of research. For some, a comparison can be found in the “*themata*” that historian of science Gerald Holton brought to light in his account of the erratic lives of physicians.⁵⁷ Usually shaped before one begins one’s career, the *themata* survive in an individual in the form of a methodological orientation, a sustainable hypothesis and an unsurpassable horizon of expectation. For example, it was due to his innate belief in the harmony of the world that the astronomer Kepler was able to jump, in spirit, from circle to ellipse as a relevant model to explain celestial mechanics, going against the grain of his acquired Pythagorean convictions. Nonetheless, the “red lines” we have sought out for our five specific cases do not exhaust the meaning of the paths that have been retraced. Furthermore, they translate various biographical perspectives depending on whether they embrace all or part of a life. On one level, there is an empathetic examination of specific moments of symptomatic separation, on another, an uncertain approach to constants and variants throughout a lifetime journey, and on yet another level, it is a matter of determining a logical pattern to connect apparently separate parts, and so on. Here are many intersecting perspectives that relate to varied units of place, time and action where exposure in the present is challenged by the recent past of its authors. Indeed, there is something of a “gamble” taking place: that of a “movement towards the other and the alteration of the ego to the construction of a self that has become other,” as summarised by François Dosse using Paul Ricœur’s concept, according to which the self is not built from the repetition of the same but in its relationship to the other.⁵⁸ It is from this dialogical and reflexive experience that these stories emanate, stories that each have more to do with an attempt at a biography than its completion. An experimental work, both individual and collective, where these gathered narrative “selves” await their readers to continue the conversation among themselves and between generations.

- 46 Finally, it must be specified that with the exception of Émile Poulat, who has no direct descendant, and of Jean Séguy, of whom Danièle Hervieu-Léger is sole legatee, the other portraits herein received the approval of their direct heirs, in particular Simone and Maria-Aubaine Desroche as well as Odile and Élisabeth Maître. In the case of François-André Isambert, the text benefited from final remarks from both Isambert himself and from his wife, Viviane Isambert-Jamati.

NOTES

1. Concerning this documentary work, see the section “*Archives du Group de sociologie des religions*” on the journal’s website (<https://journals.openedition.org/assr/>). It should be noted that, with the exception of the Poulat collection, which has been donated to the Nantes Institute for Advanced Study, the four other collections (Desroche, Isambert,

Maître, Séguy) will be conserved for consultation at the new *Grand Équipement Documentaire* located on the Condorcet Campus (Aubervilliers). The Isambert collection was inventoried at the archival department of the EHESS by Goulven Le Brech and those of Maître and Séguy by Isabelle Weiland. The former is temporarily accessible at the EHESS, the other two at the National Archives (Pierrefitte-sur-Seine). In addition to the group of authors discussed in this text, several historians contributed to establishing this biographical archive and faithfully accompanied them for five years, especially (in alphabetical order): Pierre Antoine Fabre, Thomas Hirsch, Dominique Iogna-Prat, Claude Langlois and Yann Potin.

2. Groupe sociétés, religions, laïcités (UMR 8582, EPHE-CNRS); Centre d'études en sciences sociales du religieux (UMR 8216, EHESS-CNRS). Concerning this evolution, see Pierre LASSAVE, "Le Groupe de sociologie des religions (1954-1995). Éléments de parcours", in Céline BÉRAUD, Bruno DURIEZ, Béatrice de GASQUET (eds), *Sociologues en quête de religion*, Rennes, Presses universitaires de Rennes, coll. "Sciences des religions", 2018, p. 15-25.

3. Denis PELLETIER, *Économie et humanisme. De l'utopie communautaire au combat pour le Tiers-monde (1941-1966)*, Paris, Éditions du Cerf, 1996.

4. Jean-René TRÉANTON, "Les premières années du Centre d'études sociologiques (1946-1955)", *Revue française de sociologie*, 32-3, 1991, p. 391.

5. Jean DUVIGNAUD, *L'oubli ou la chute des corps*, Arles, Actes Sud, 1995, p. 112.

6. Isabelle KALINOWSKI, "Introduction", in Max Weber, *Sociologie de la religion*, Paris, Flammarion, coll. "Champs. Classiques", 2013, p. 69.

7. "It is true that I am absolutely 'unmusical' in matters religious and that I have neither the need nor the ability to erect any religious 'edifices' within me — that is simply impossible for me, and I reject it. But after examining myself carefully I must say that I am neither anti-religious nor irreligious." (M. Weber, letter to Ferdinand Tönnies dated 19 February 1909, French version translated and commented by Jean-Pierre Grossein in his "Introduction" to M. WEBER, *Sociologie des religions*, Paris, Gallimard, coll. "Bibliothèque des sciences humaines", 1996, p. 72). [English translation in James T. KLOPPENBERG, *Uncertain Victory: Social Democracy and Progressivism in European and American Thought, 1870-1920*, Oxford University Press, 24 March 1988, p. 948.] Concerning this foundational crisis in the scholar's life, see also Jürgen KRAUBE, *Max Weber. Une vie entre deux époques*, trans. by Sacha Zilberfarb, Paris, Éd. de la MSH, coll. "Bibliothèque allemande", 2016 [2014].

8. Henri-Charles PUECH, Paul VIGNAUX, "La science des religions en France" (1937), cited in Henri Desroche, Jean Séguy (eds.), *Introduction aux sciences humaines des religions*, Paris, Cujas, coll. "Genèses", 1970, p. 35. The quote was part of the redrafting of the initial text. It must be noted that the scholars brought together during the 1937 World's Fair sought the intensification of international relations in order to ward off the threats of a world war, as Célestin Bouglé indicated in his preface to the collective work *Les sciences sociales en France. Enseignement et recherche*, Paris, Hartmann, coll. "Centre d'études de politique étrangère", 1937.

9. H.-C. PUECH, P. VIGNAUX, "La science des religions en France", *op. cit.*, p. 35.

10. This information follows statements made by Simone Desroche, trustee of her husband's archives, to explain the abandoned box of leaflets in her garage.

11. François-André ISAMBERT, “Quarante ans déjà...”, *Archives de sciences sociales des religions*, 93, 1996, p. 20.
12. André MARY, “Les Archives... Cinquante ans... après”, *Archives de sciences sociales des religions*, 136, 2006, p. 16-17. [English translation: Anthony Blasi, Giuseppe Giordan, *Sociologies of Religion. National Traditions*, Leiden-Boston, Brill, coll. “Religion & Social Order”, 2015, p. 242]
13. Thomas HIRSCH, “Gabriel Le Bras ou le ministère des sciences sociales”, 2018 (unpublished, with the collaboration of Yann Potin), Pierrefitte-sur-Seine, National Archives.
14. Émile POULAT, *L'ère postchrétienne*, Paris, Flammarion, 1994, p. 64. The footnote is by André Mary.
15. A. MARY, “Les Archives... Cinquante ans... après”, *op. cit.*, p. 17. The *in memoriam* Émile-G. Léonard, signed by G. Le Bras, was published in *Archives de sociologie des religions*, 14, 1962, p. 3-5.
16. Gabriel LE BRAS, “Statistique et histoire religieuses. Pour un examen détaillé et pour une explication historique de l'état du catholicisme dans les diverses régions de France”, *Revue d'histoire de l'Église de France*, 17-77, 1931, p. 425-449.
17. Henri MENDRAS, *Comment devenir sociologue. Souvenirs d'un vieux mandarin*, Arles, Actes Sud, 1995, p. 26.
18. Dominique JULIA, “Un passeur de frontières. Gabriel Le Bras et l'enquête sur la pratique religieuse en France”, *Revue d'histoire de l'Église de France*, 92, 2006, p. 381-413.
19. G. LE BRAS, “La pratique religieuse des paysans français”, *Études*, 235-6, 1938, p. 145-163.
20. T. HIRSCH, “Gabriel Le Bras ou le ministère des sciences sociales”, *op. cit.*, p. 11.
21. D. JULIA (“Un passeur de frontières. Gabriel Le Bras et l'enquête sur la pratique religieuse en France”, *op. cit.*, p. 394-395) who is quoting the communication made by Le Bras on February 2nd 1935 at the French Institute of Sociology, then led by Marcel Mauss, and published in the *Annales sociologiques*, series E (led by Maurice Halbwachs), fascicle 2, 1937, p. 15-71.
22. Jacques MAÎTRE, “Gabriel le Bras, briseur de barrages (1891-1970)”, *Revue française de sociologie*, 11-4, 1970, p. 578.
23. “Thus, we can see that old land, sparse populations, large property and right-wing politics go hand in hand, whereas calcareous or alluvial land, divided property and democratic politics go together” (André SIEGFRIED, *Tableau politique de la France de l'Ouest sous la Troisième République*, Paris, Armand Colin, 1913, p. 20).
24. G. LE BRAS, *Introduction à l'histoire de la pratique religieuse en France*, Paris, Presses universitaires de France, 1942, p. 18-19.
25. From 1935 to 1938, the studies of religious practices in dioceses initiated by G. Le Bras were partly financed by the Fluid Research Fund (Rockefeller Fondation), through the *Conseil universitaire de la recherche sociale* (CURS). See Ludovic TOURNÈS, “La fondation Rockefeller et la construction d'une politique des sciences sociales en France (1918-1940)”, *Annales. Histoire, Sciences Sociales*, 63, 6, 2008, p. 1371-1402.
26. G. LE BRAS, “Note sur la sociologie religieuse dans l'Année sociologique”, *Archives de sociologie des religions*, 21-1, 1966, p. 52.

27. “For the year 1945 alone, quickly looking through the hundreds of envelopes where he kept his correspondence safe, though haphazardly stored, shows that he belonged to the *Comité adjoint à la nouvelle Direction générale des arts et des lettres*, the *Commission d’études pour la réforme de l’enseignement supérieur*, the *Comité consultatif provisoire de la Lecture publique*, the *Commission d’Histoire de l’Occupation et de la Libération de la France*, to which must be added the *Centre de coordination et de synthèse des études sur la reconstruction* for the Ministry of PPT and even the *Jury du prix Sully-Olivier de Serre des sciences sociales agricoles* at the Ministry of Agriculture” (T. HIRSCH, “Gabriel Le Bras ou le ministère des sciences sociales”, *op. cit.*, p. 14).

28. In a 1948 report submitted to the Rockefeller Foundation, the geographer Jean Gottmann observed two currents of thought playing major roles in the intellectual life of post-war France: on the one hand, Marxism and on the other, social sciences, from which two major figures emerged: Lucien Febvre and Gabriel Le Bras. The former was originally with Marc Bloch at the *École des Annales*; the latter, less well known, was nevertheless an enterprising scholar at the centre of many networks. In this time of burgeoning Cold War, the very broad political spectrum of Le Bras’ relationships, from the Vatican to Moscow, appears to have made it difficult to make him a completely reliable correspondent (information given by Yann Potin). Concerning the relationship between the Rockefeller Foundation and the development of social sciences in France, see Brigitte MAZON, *Aux origines de l’École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales. Le rôle du mécénat américain (1920-1960)*, Paris, Éd. de l’EHESS, 1988; L. TOURNÈS, *Sciences de l’homme et politique: les fondations philanthropiques américaines en France au XX^e siècle*, Paris, Classiques Garnier, 2011.

29. G. LE BRAS, “Secteurs et aspects nouveaux de la Sociologie religieuse”, *Cahiers internationaux de sociologie*, vol. 1, 1946, p. 39-66.

30. Loïc BLONDIAUX, “Comment rompre avec Durkheim? Jean Stoetzel et la sociologie française de l’après-guerre (1945-1958)”, *Revue française de sociologie*, 32-33, 1991, p. 416.

31. For example, we can cite the trilogy of essays circulating via the *Éditions du Cerf* in the clergy anxious to renew evangelisation by relying on sociological instruments: Henri GODIN, Yvan DANIEL, *La France pays de mission?* (1943); Fernand BOULARD, *Problèmes missionnaires de la France rurale* (1945); Georges MICHONNEAU, *Paroisse, communauté missionnaire* (1946). Pope Pius XII commented: “We can observe among Catholics in France, particularly in the Catholic Action, an attempt at lucidity that has justifiably captured the attention of the world. The progress of sociology is successfully used in areas where its data are applicable; we are endeavouring to see clearly in order to act efficiently” (*Osservatore Romano*, 1953).

32. Alain CHENU, “Les enquêteurs du dimanche. Revisiter les statistiques françaises de pratique du catholicisme (1930-1980)”, *Histoire & Mesure*, 26-2, 2011, p. 177-221. Some examples of the ecclesiastical assessment of this exceptional sociographical mobilisation of clerics that came to a halt in the 1970s include: Yvon TRANVOUEZ, “Clercs et sciences humaines dans les conflits pastoraux du catholicisme français (1945-1978)”, *Port Acadie*, 24-25-26, 2014, p. 317-334; Guillaume CUCHET, *Comment notre monde a cessé d’être chrétien. Anatomie d’un effondrement*, Paris, Éd. du Seuil, coll. “La couleur des idées”, 2018.

33. François FURET, “Avant-propos”, in F. BOULARD, *Matériaux pour l’histoire religieuse du peuple français (XIX^e-XX^e siècles)*, Paris, Éd. de l’EHESS-Presses de la FNSP-CNRS Éd., 1982, p. 9-10, here p. 9.
34. É. POULAT, *L’ère postchrétienne*, *op. cit.*, p. 64.
35. G. LE BRAS, “Préface”, in F. Boulard, *Premiers itinéraires en sociologie religieuse*, Paris, Éd. ouvrières-Économie et Humanisme, coll. “Sociologie religieuse”, 1954, p. 7-10, here p. 7-8.
36. Quote by Claude Lévi-Strauss (“Introduction à l’œuvre de Marcel Mauss”, in M. MAUSS, *Sociologie et anthropologie*, 1950, p. XXVIII) in H. DESROCHE, *Sociologies religieuses*, Paris, Presses universitaires de France, coll. “Le sociologue”, 1968, p. 217-218. [English Translation by Felicity Baker: “Introduction to the Work of Marcel Mauss”, London, Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1987, p. 30-31.]
37. In his description of the complex relationship between Desroche and Le Bras, André Mary (chapter 1) revisits this episode.
38. B. DURIEZ, “La sociologie dans ou sur la religion ? Du Centre catholique de sociologie religieuse à l’Association française de sciences sociales des religions (AFSR)”, in C. BÉRAUD, B. DURIEZ, B. de GASQUET (eds), *Sociologues en quête de religion*, *op. cit.*, p. 27-40.
39. Danièle HERVIEU-LÉGER, “Le B.B. : un outil de la formation d’une communauté savante”, *Archives de sciences sociales des religions*, 136, 2006, p. 53-61.
40. Patricia VANNIER, “Les caractéristiques dominantes de la production du Centre d’études sociologiques (1946-1968): entre perpétuation durkheimienne et affiliation marxiste”, *Revue d’histoire des sciences humaines*, 2-1, 2000, p. 125-145.
41. Letter quoted and commented in Yann POTIN, “Le passeur et la barrière. Gabriel Le Bras, le Groupe de sociologie des religions et la mémoire de Durkheim”, *Archives de sciences sociales des religions*, 159, 2012, p. 113-133.
42. Olivier TSCHANNEN, *Les théories de la sécularisation*, Geneva, Paris, Librairie Droz, 1992; Liliane VOYÉ, Jaak BILLIET (eds), *Sociology and Religion. An Ambiguous Relationship*, Leuven, Leuven University Press, coll. “Kadoc-Studies”, 1999. Concerning the problematic notion of schools in social sciences: Jean-Louis FABIANI, “Faire école en sciences sociales”, *Les Cahiers du Centre de Recherches Historiques*, 36, 2005. Available at <<https://openedition.org/ccrh/3060>>.
43. Gilles KEPEL, *La revanche de Dieu. Chrétiens, juifs et musulmans à la reconquête du monde*, Paris, Éd. du Seuil, 1991.
44. Plenary conference given in 1982 at the *Association française de sociologie religieuse* (AFSR): Pierre BOURDIEU, “Sociologues de la croyance et croyances des sociologues”, *Archives de sciences sociales des religions*, 63-1, 1987, p. 155-161.
45. É. POULAT, *L’ère postchrétienne*, *op. cit.*, p. 294.
46. J. MAÎTRE, “Avant-propos dialogué avec Pierre Bourdieu”, in *L’autobiographie d’un paranoïaque : l’abbé Berry (1878-1947), et le roman de Billy, Introïbo*, Paris, Anthropos, coll. “Psychanalyse”, 1994.
47. Maryvonne PRÉVOT, *Catholicisme social et urbanisme. Maurice Ducreux (1924-1985) et la fabrique de la Cité*, Rennes, Presses universitaires de Rennes, coll. “Histoire”, 2015.
48. It is with this biblical scene that he ends his *Sociologies religieuses* (*op. cit.*) that served as a handbook for the sub-discipline. Moreover, the English translation of the book is

called *Jacob and the Angel: An Essay in Sociologies of Religion* (University Press of Massachusetts, 1973), on the cover of which there is this mythical battle reproduced in the engraving by Gustave Doré.

49. F.-A. ISAMBERT, *De la religion à l'éthique*, Paris, Éd. du Cerf, coll. "Sciences humaines et religions", 1992, p. 395.

50. Véronique ALTGLAS, Matthew WOOD (eds.), *Bringing Back the Social into the Sociology of Religion. Critical Approaches*, Leiden, Brill, coll. "Studies in Critical Research on Religion", 2018. On the institutional transformations of the discipline, see A. CHENU, "Une institution sans intention. La sociologie en France depuis la guerre", *Actes de la recherche en sciences sociales*, 141-142, 2002, p. 46-59. On the religious speciality today, see C. BÉRAUD, B. DURIEZ, B. de GASQUET (eds), *Sociologues en quête de religion*, *op. cit.* (in particular the contributions of Céline Béraud, Baptiste Coulmont, Béatrice de Gasquet and Olivier Martin), as well as P. LASSAVE, *La sociologie des religions. Une communauté de savoir*, Paris, Éd. de l'EHESS, coll. "En temps et lieux", 2019.

51. For autobiographical and self-reflexive displays, the two main sources are as follows: 1) Titus HJELM, Phil ZUCKERMAN (eds), *Studying Religion and Society. Sociological Self-Portraits*, New York, Routledge, 2013, with contributions from Nancy T. Ammerman, William Sims Bainbridge, Eileen Barker, James A. Beckford, Peter Beyer, Irena Borowik, Steve Bruce, Mark Chaves, Grace Davie, Karel Dobbelaere, Barry A. Kosmin, Robert A. Orsi, Wade Clark Roof, Jean-Paul Willaime, Robert Wuthnow. 2) Yves LAMBERT, Guy MICHELAT, Albert PIETTE (eds), *Le religieux des sociologues. Trajectoires personnelles et débats scientifiques*, Paris, L'Harmattan, coll. "Religion et sciences humaines", 1997, with contributions from Régine Azria, Jean-Pierre Bastian, Françoise Champion, Élisabeth Claverie, Martine Cohen, Fanny Colonna, Bruno Duriez, Danièle Hervieu-Léger, Yves Lambert, Michael Löwy, René Luneau, André Mary, Patrick Michel, Guy Michelat, Albert Piette, Freddy Raphaël, Gilles Tarabout, Jean-Paul Willaime. For a critical assessment, see P. LASSAVE, "Autoportraits de sociologues des religions", *Archives de sciences sociales des religions*, 164, 2013, p. 79-84.

52. Frédéric de CONINCK, Francis GODARD, "L'approche biographique à l'épreuve de l'interprétation : les formes temporelles de la causalité", *Revue française de sociologie*, 31-1, 1989, p. 23-53. Jean-Claude PASSERON, *Le raisonnement sociologique. L'espace non-poppérien du raisonnement naturel*, Paris, Nathan, coll. "Essais et recherches", 1991 (chapter 8: "Le scénario et le corpus. Biographies, flux, trajectoires").

53. D. HERVIEU-LÉGER, *La religion pour mémoire*, Paris, Éd. du Cerf, coll. "Sciences humaines et religions", 1993, p. 119. [*Religion as a Chain of Memory*, New Brunswick, Rutgers University Press, 2000, translation by Simon Lee.]

54. For the context of this debate in French sociology in the 1980s, see Isambert's critique of the proposals made by Bruno Latour (1985), Bloor (1976) *et al.* for a "strong programme" in the science of sociology, F. A. ISAMBERT, "Un programme fort en sociologie de la science?", *Revue française de sociologie*, 26-3, 1985, p. 485-508. Available online: <https://www.persee.fr/doc/rfsoc_0035-2969_1985_num_26_3_3968>.

55. This includes Pierre Ansart, Georges Balandier, Raymond Boudon, Pierre Bourdieu, Robert Castel, Michel Crozier, Jean Duvignaud, Eugène Enriquez, Georges Lapassade, Edgar Morin, Serge Moscovici, Renaud Sainsaulieu, Alain Touraine. Their life stories are for the most part accessible in the *Cahiers du laboratoire de changement social* of Paris Diderot University in the *Changement social* collection published by L'Harmattan,

issues 11 (2007), 12 (2007), 16 (2010). To these hundreds of pages, the autobiographical texts published separately by several of the contributors can be added.

56. Jean-Philippe B OUILLOU, *Devenir sociologue. Histoires de vie et choix théoriques*, Toulouse, Éditions Érès, coll. "Sociologie critique", 2009, p. 386.

57. Gerald HOLTON, *The Scientific Imagination: Case Studies*, Cambridge-London-New York-Melbourne, Cambridge University Press, 1978.

58. François DOSSE, *Le pari biographique. Écrire une vie*, Paris, La Découverte, 2005, p. 11.

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