PROGRAMA DE PÓS-GRADUAÇÃO EM EDUCAÇÃO
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Os estudantes da Universidade Paris 8 Vincennes-Saint-Denis e a religião: ensaio de contextualização social e histórica[1]

Charles SOULIÉ[2]

Resumo

Este artigo se interessa pelas crenças religiosas dos estudantes da Universidade Paris 8 Vincennes-Saint-Denis, mostrando que elas variam fortemente em função das nacionalidades, origens, disciplinas cursadas. A fim de levar em conta efeitos de campo tão poderosos no nível do ensino superior parisiense, fizemos em seguida um retorno ao ensino secundário, depois às grandes escolas parisienses que exercem um papel central na produção das elites intelectuais e políticas à moda francesa: no caso a Escola Normal Superior da rua d'Ulm e Ciências Políticas Paris. Essa volta nos permitiu contextualizar os resultados obtidos na Paris 8. assim como começar a tomar consciência do peso da herança tanto histórica quanto religiosa na constituição do campo acadêmico parisiense.

Palavras-chaves: Campo. História. Religiões. Sistema Educativo.

[1] The translation into Portuguese was carried out by Ione Ribeiro Valle. The original title is "Les étudiants de l'Université Paris 8 Vincennes-Saint-Denis et la religion: essai de contextualisation sociale et historique." An earlier version was published in *Regards Sociologiques*, no. 56, 2020, pp. 103–126, under the title "Les étudiants de Paris-8 Vincennes et la religion: essai de contextualisation sociale et historique." Available at: https://www.regards-sociologiques.fr/n56-2021-06. This version, translated into Portuguese by Ione Ribeiro Valle, has been adapted and contains some additions and omissions.

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The students of the University Paris 8 Vincennes-Saint Denis and religion: an attempt at social and historical contextualization

Charles SOULIÉ

Abstract

This article looks at the religious beliefs of students of the University Paris 8 Vincennes-Sciences and illustrates from the outset how these beliefs vary according to nationality, origin and academic disciplines. In order to take into account the field effects which are so powerful at the level of Parisian higher education institutions, the article then makes a detour first to secondary education and then to two Parisian elite institutions that play a central role in producing intellectual and political elites in the typical French manner: the *Ecole normale superieure* and *Sciences Po Paris*. This detour allows the author to contextualise the results obtained in Paris 8. as well as to develop increasing awareness of the weight of tradition, both historical and religious, in the formation of the field of academic institutions in Paris.

Keywords: Field. Education System. History. Religions.

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Les étudiants de l'Université Paris 8 Vincennes-Saint-Denis et la religion : essai de contextualiation sociale et historique

Charles SOULIÉ

Résumé

Cet article s'intéresse aux croyances religieuses des étudiants de l'université Paris 8 Vincennes-Saint-Denis en montrant déjà que celles-ci varient fortement en fonction des nationalités, origines, disciplines étudiées. Afin de tenir compte des effets de champ si puissants au niveau de l'enseignement supérieur parisien, nous avons ensuite fait un détour par l'enseignement secondaire puis par deux grandes écoles parisiennes jouant un rôle central dans la production des élites intellectuelles et politiques à la française : en l'occurrence l'École normale supérieure de la rue d'Ulm et Sciences Po Paris. Et ce détour nous a permis de contextualiser les résultats obtenus à Paris 8. comme de commencer à prendre conscience du poids de l'héritage tant historique que religieux dans la constitution du champ académique parisien.

Mots clefs: Champ. Histoire. Religions. Système Éducatif.

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Los alumnos de la Universidad París 8 Vincennes-Saint-Denis y la religión: ensayo de contextualización social e histórica

Charles SOULIÉ

Resumen

Este artículo se interesa por las creencias religiosas de los estudiantes de la Universidad París 8 Vincennes-Saint-Denis, mostrando que varían mucho según las nacionalidades, los orígenes y las disciplinas cursadas. Para tener en cuenta estos potentes efectos de campo a nivel de la enseñanza superior parisina, volvemos a la enseñanza secundaria, y luego a las grandes escuelas parisinas que desempeñan un papel central en la producción de élites intelectuales y políticas a la francesa: en este caso, la Escuela Normal Superior de la rue d'Ulm y Sciences Politiques Paris. Este regreso nos permitió contextualizar los resultados obtenidos en París 8. así como empezar a ser conscientes del peso de la herencia histórica y religiosa en la constitución del campo académico parisino.

Palabras clave: Campo. La historia. Religiones. Sistema educativo.

Introduction

"(...) the critique of religion is the premise of all criticism."

Karl Marx[3]

The renewed focus on the religious question in France with the growing visibility of Islam and, to a lesser extent, evangelical Christianity in working-class neighborhoods, as well as in the more marginalized areas of the school and university systems challenges many teachers and intellectuals, who are often ill-equipped to address it. To borrow the words of Danièle Hervieu-Léger, one could speak of a kind of "secular embarrassment" in the face of the religious phenomenon, which is frequently perceived as particularly "suspicious" and is ordinarily relegated to the private sphere, despite being an eminently social and collective fact. (HERVIEU-LÉGER, 1993)[4] One of the objectives of this article based on a survey and interviews, and informed by our daily experience as a teacher and researcher in sociology is to provide elements of objectification on this subject, as well as to outline some lines of reflection regarding the dynamics of religion in the student environment.

Not being a sociologist of religion but rather of education which accounts for the originality of my approach—it was for pedagogical reasons that I became interested in religion. In fact, after more than twenty years of teaching introductory sociology courses to aspiring sociologists, most of whom come from working-class and/or immigrant backgrounds, I observed the growing interest that religion provoked, manifested, for example, in the quality of silence that settles over the classroom when I begin to speak about it. The same occurs when I address issues such as sexuality or partner selection domains in which religions often issue very strong prescriptions, particularly affecting women (virginity, religious endogamy, etc.). It was the heightened sensitivity of my audience (mostly female)

[3] MARX, Karl, 1971, p. 50.

[4] See especially the introductory chapter, entitled "*La sociologie contre la religion? Considérations préalables*".

to these topics that, despite their more or less taboo nature within the secular French university context, led me to initiate a series of surveys with them[5].

This work therefore presents a pedagogical, scientific, and also civic perspective. By mobilizing the standard methods of sociology, the aim was despite, and perhaps also because of, the pressure of a dramatic current context marked by a wave of terrorist attacks committed by fanatical Muslims on French territory to offer students who wished to do so the possibility of developing a form of distancing, a methodological as well as epistemological shift, enabling them to begin reflecting on their own relationship with religion through the production of empirically grounded knowledge on the subject.

The initial survey was a questionnaire-based study launched in the first semester of the 2004/2005 academic year, involving 1.280 undergraduate students in their first and second years at Université Paris 8. These students were enrolled in and drawn from a rational sample of nine academic disciplines. According to a protocol already tested in a survey on students' expectations, each discipline was covered by a pair of interviewers who, after obtaining the instructors' consent, distributed a one-page, double-sided questionnaire at the beginning of class sessions—thus taking advantage of the pedagogical setup to achieve excellent response rates. The questionnaire focused primarily on students' opinions and practices concerning religion, social norms, and politics. It provided the statistical framework for this study.

In the second semester, we extended the study through a round of semi-structured interviews (n=42) conducted with questionnaire respondents. The aim was to better understand the results obtained, using an approach inspired by Weberian sociology. This allowed us to study the two necessarily complementary dimensions of religion as a quintessential social fact. On the one hand, as Durkheim would say, religion can be understood as a set of "ways of acting, thinking, and feeling" that impose themselves externally on the individual according to their group affiliation. On the other

[5] The students' interest in issues related to partner choice—and the phrase frequently heard in Muslim communities that "marriage is half of religion"—also led us, after a few years, to have them work on this topic, primarily through the construction of their family tree. The aim was to methodically study questions of homogamy and endogamy within their social environment (PEROSA; SOULIÉ, 2020).

hand, religion can also be seen as a potential space more or less "personal" or "private" for expression, reappropriation, rationalization, and stylization of one's life based on stereotyped religious models.

Then, in 2015. with the aim of comparing and contextualizing an effort to which we sought to bring a certain historical depth we turned our attention to the transformations in the relationship that secondary school students have with religion, as well as to the role of Catholicism in two prestigious institutions: the École Normale Supérieure (ENS) on Rue d'Ulm and Sciences Po [6] Paris). Thanks to the decentralization we were able to carry out, this detour helped us better understand what we had previously observed at Paris 8.

The delayed publication of these findings may undoubtedly come as a surprise. In fact, some of the results particularly those relating to students' opinions on matters of morality made us hesitate for quite some time before publishing, as we did not wish to contribute to the stigmatization of individuals from working-class and/or racialized backgrounds. Ultimately, however, it was our 2015 study that led us to move forward with the publication of this work.

"The one who believed in heaven and the one who did not"[7]

The university that served as the setting for our study Paris 8 Vincennes-Saint-Denis is one of the outcomes of the events of May 1968. It is the successor of the former Experimental University Center of Vincennes, which was originally located in the heart of the Bois de Vincennes and opened its doors in December 1968. This center brought together much of the academic and intellectual avant-garde of the time, along with a significant number of students, professors, and administrative and technical staff, all highly politicized, many of whom identified as Marxists. This allowed them, from very early on, to form a "red base" and maintain an active political life[8].

[6] Commonly referred to as Sciences Po Paris. [N.T.]

[7] Excerpt from a poem by Louis Aragon, entitled *"La rose et le réséda"* (1943) [*The Rose and the Mignonette*].

[8] For the history of Université Paris 8, see Soulié (2014).

Religion is not an issue in the microcosm of Vincennes, which was subsequently marked by the rise of countercultural leftism, feminism, the homosexual movement, as well as the development of the "philosophies of desire," initiated locally by Gilles Deleuze, among others. This distance from religion, often regarded as outdated, intellectually weak, etc., and rejected in favor of the omnipresent "Everything is political" mindset of the time, is also found among foreign students who, since 1970. have been particularly numerous at this university, to the point of making it the most foreign university in France. For example, students from the Maghreb and sub-Saharan Africa became carriers of secular and progressive ideologies that accompanied the process of decolonization, as well as the building of national states, offering many alternatives to graduates from higher education in the West. And, frequently alongside their professors who had studied abroad, these students helped make Vincennes one of the homes of Third Worldism in France.

However, in 1980. after the retreat of the great leftist wave of the 1960s and 70s, Paris 8 moved from Bois Vincennes to be authoritatively transferred to Seine-Saint-Denis. In other words, to a particularly working-class suburb with a significant proportion of foreigners and immigrant workers. In favor of its sectorization and the second wave of student massification at the end of the 1980s, the university's demographic shifted significantly, now comprising a growing proportion of children of immigrants, directly graduated from high school, who gradually replaced the previous population of salaried students, non-graduates, or those who had returned to their studies one of the university's main characteristics.

However, today, Paris 8 still has the highest proportion of foreign students in France. Hence its designation as the "World University," which makes it a privileged observatory of globalization: yet another biased observatory[9]. Due to its historical heritage, as well as the selection and segregation mechanisms for foreign students in the Parisian higher education system, this "world" is primarily centered on countries in the Global South, with Paris 8 standing out for having a higher proportion of students from former French colonies and, therefore, a form of "bottom-up" internationalization. Meanwhile, the more prestigious institutions in central Paris, whose social and academic recruitment is also higher, host more Europeans, Americans, and Asians—i.e., a population that is clearly less

[9] In 2003/2004, foreign students made up 34.7% of the total enrollment at Paris 8, across all academic cycles, compared to 13.6% for all French universities.. (FRANCE. Université de Paris 8, 2004, p. 1; FRANCE. Ministère de l'Éducation Nationale. 2004, p. 177).

racialized and more affluent. Thus, university globalization does not present the same face across institutions, but also within faculties and disciplines within each, reflecting very faithfully the scientific, economic, linguistic, cultural, and ultimately political relations of domination between continents and countries.

Schematically, three populations can be distinguished at Paris 8: the heirs (from the past) of Vincennes' intellectual political tradition, which is also claimed by many of the more left-wing professors at this institution; the children of immigrants; and, finally, the foreign students. These three groups do not maintain the same relationship with religion.

In 2004/2005. 49.9% of undergraduate students in their first and second years at Paris 8 identified as non-religious, atheists, or did not specify their belief[10], while in 2007. the rate of non-believers reached 32.8% across the entire French population (DARGENT, 2010/2. p. 227). Therefore, the proportion of non-believers is particularly high at Paris 8. This can be explained by the history of the university and the youthfulness of its student body, with younger generations generally being less religious than others[11].

Table 1 - Religious affiliation of first- and second-year undergraduate students at Paris 8 in 2004/2005. according to their nationality.

	France	**Europe**	**Maghreb**	**Sub-Saharan Africa**	**Asia**	**Americas and Others**	**Total %**	**Totals**
None, no response	55.7%	50%	8.2%	3.6%	43.2%	51.9%	49.9%	639
Muslim	14.6%	1.4%	87.7%	57.1%	24.3%	0%	19.8%	254
Catholic	11.2%	20.8%	0%	16.1%	5.4%	22.2%	11.4%	146
Christian	5.7%	5.6%	0%	7.1%	5.4%	3.7%	5.4%	69

[10] To understand the religion of the students, we asked two successive questions: "Are you a believer? Yes/No," and "If yes, which religion or what is your belief?" The figures presented here are based solely on the answers to the second question, as some students answered affirmatively to the first question without responding to the second.

[11] For example, in 1991, the proportion of non-religious individuals was 18% in the general French population, compared to 34% among those aged 18-24 (LAMBERT, 1992, p. 39)

Protestant	2.7%	2.8%	0%	10.7%	5.4%	7.4%	3%	39
Buddhist	0.9%	1.4%	0%	0%	16.2%	3.7%	1.3%	17
Orthodox	0.4%	12.5%	0%	0%	0%	0%	1%	13
Jewish	1%	0%	1.4%	0%	0%	0%	0.9%	11
Other religions, beliefs	7.9%	5.6%	2.7%	5.4%	0%	11.1%	7.2%	92
Total %	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	1.280
Totals	1.015	72	73	56	37	27	1.280	

Source: Questionnaires administered by the author.

However, the percentage of non-believers is twice as high among the French (55.7%) compared to foreigners (27.9%). Non-belief (as declared) is rare, even exceptional, among students from the Maghreb (8.2%), and even more so among students from Sub-Saharan Africa (3.6%), while it aligns more closely with the average among other foreign students. As for the Maghreb and Sub-Saharan Africa, it seems that, in these countries, religious belief currently holds a mandatory character, similar to what existed in pre-Revolutionary France or in the rural world, with non-belief being unthinkable. Religion, therefore, imposes itself as an undeniable fact both familiarly and socially, making it seem difficult to escape. This explains the often unavoidable nature of collective practices, such as Ramadan or attending Sunday Mass.

This resurgence of religion, notably linked to post-colonial political disillusionments, has, for example, led Algeria the country providing the largest contingent of foreign students at Paris 8 to make Islam the state religion, and Morocco to define itself in its constitution as "the land of Islam." Based on a survey conducted in 2006, sociologists from the University of Casablanca also speak of a "regaining of religiosity in Muslim societies," notably in Morocco, where religiosity is currently very pronounced and religious practices are the most observed. They note that today's Moroccan youth is "more religiously observant than the Moroccan youth of yesterday"(EL AYADI; RACHIK; TOZY, 2013. p. 218-219)[12]

[12] This resurgence of religious belief in young generations can also be observed, to some extent, in France.

Table 2 - Religious affiliation in France from 1988 to 2007.

	1988	**1995**	**1997**	**2002**	**2007**
Catholics	81.9%	74.7%	72.9%	67.9%	57.2%
No religion, no response	13.3%	20.5%	22.8%	26%	32.8%
Muslims	0.6%	0.8%	0.7%	2%	5%
Other religions	2%	1.2%	0.9%	1.3%	2.3%
Protestants	1.9%	2.3%	2.2%	2.3%	2%
Jewishs	0.4%	0.4%	0.6%	0.5%	0.6%
Total %	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%

Source: DARGENT, op. cit., p. 222 e 227. (Table reconstructed under the author's supervision)

At Paris 8, while the numerically dominant group is the non-religious French, among the foreign students, as well as among the French, the largest religion is Islam. In 2007, France had 57.2% Catholics and 5% Muslims (Table 2). Catholicism, the historically dominant religion in France, is therefore a minority at Paris 8. It is more present among foreign students from other European countries, often more religious than France, such as Poland, Portugal, or Italy, as well as among those from South America, the Caribbean, or Sub-Saharan Africa, than among the French. This explains the growing presence of African priests in French Catholic churches.

Similarly, the significance of "Christians" (5.4%), as well as Protestants (3%), is linked to the strong presence at Paris 8 of diasporas from Sub-Saharan Africa, the Antilles, and Haiti. Finally, Jews, Buddhists, and Orthodox individuals make up only 3% of respondents, while those who adhere to other, often non-institutionalized, religions or beliefs account for a considerable 7.2% of the total. Among these, there are many "beliefs in God" that do not refer to a particular religion but to a form of "personal" religion.

This significant percentage of believers who are not affiliated with what Grace Davie calls "believing without belonging" is undoubtedly explained by the relatively open formulation of the question, which implicitly placed institutional religions or “conventional” religions, as the Anglo-Saxons say—on the same plane as other more or less crystallized and institutionalized beliefs among

the youth and the educational and cultural capital of a fraction of the studied population. It is noticeable that this distancing from institutional religions, this bricolage or "do-it-yourself" approach to religion, has a strong subjective and pragmatic connotation (only what I have proven, perceived, or personally understood is true), or as some authors write, "this individualization and subjectivization of belief" (BOBINEAU; TANK-STORPER, 2007, p. 89). All of this helps explain the importation of religions, such as Buddhism in the West (but in a Westernized version), which is found more frequently among the French than among foreign students, and is particularly rare among foreign students from Asia and the Maghreb. It is known that the former practice "meditation" (more or less "freely") more often, while the latter pray more classically and more frequently use the language of obligation to describe their religious practices (I pray because my religion commands me to, because this is part of "the five pillars of Islam"), thus emphasizing the importance of orthopraxy within these communities. Similarly, this spiritual bricolage, which can take on a more intellectualist bent, is more frequent among students of the arts, communication, or anthropology than among economists, computer scientists, or historians. These different disciplines do not attract the same audiences and also do not cultivate the same intellectual and political dispositions among their students.

Migration process and acculturation

In order to distinguish the population of children of immigrants, we created a student typology combining geographic, nationality, and language criteria, which allowed us to identify three groups. The first, conventionally labeled as "French by origin," includes students who completed their secondary education in France and whose father is French, accounting for 58.7% of the respondents. The second group consists of children of immigrants who completed their secondary education in France but whose father is foreign (22.9%). The third group consists of "foreigners," students who completed their secondary education abroad (18.4%)[13].

[13] Since many children of immigrants did not acquire French nationality, we chose to prioritize the variable related to the location of secondary education to determine the students' nationality. As a result, it was not possible to subsequently consider the nationality variable in the strict sense to construct the category of foreign students. To clarify, we note that the UNESCO definition of a foreign student is as follows: "A foreign student is a person enrolled in a higher education institution in a country or territory where they do not have permanent residence." This definition thus distinguishes foreign students residing in the country from those in a mobility situation. (COULON; PAIVANDI, 2003, p. 6)

Next, in order to differentiate the group of "French by origin," we subdivided them into three subgroups according to the language spoken at home. This allowed us to distinguish the subgroup of French by origin where only French is spoken (44.8%) from those where another European language and Creole are spoken (9.3%), and from those where a non-European language is spoken at home (4.6%), with Arabic being the predominant language. Finally, we distinguished the children of immigrants and foreign students based on the father's nationality. The combination of these criteria ultimately allowed us to create 14 types of students and begin to more finely differentiate the waves of migrants based on their length of stay as well as their geographic origin.

Table 3 - Religious affiliation of students according to their origins..

	None, no response	**Muslim**	**Catholic**	**Christian**	**Orthodox**	**Protestant**	**Jewish**	**Buddhist**	**Others**	**Total %**	**Totais**
French by origin + French only	71.7%	1.6%	11.7%	4.9%	0.2%	2.1%	0.9%	0.7%	6.3%	100%	573
French by origin + European language	54.6%	0.8%	18.5%	5.9%	0%	5.0%	0.8%	0%	14.3%	100%	119
French by origin + Non-European language	32.2%	44.1%	6.8%	5.1%	0%	3.4%	0%	1.7%	6.8%	100%	59
Child of immigrant from Europe	51.9%	1.9%	21.2%	9.6%	5.8%	0.0%	0%	1.9%	7.7%	100%	52
Child of immigrant from the Maghreb	13.6%	73.5%	0.8%	0.8%	0%	0.0%	0.8%	0%	10.6%	100%	132
Child of immigrant from Africa	11.9%	23.8%	26.2%	16.7%	0%	7.1%	0%	0%	14.3%	100%	42

Child of immigrant from Asia	38.5%	34.6%	7.7%	0%	0%	3.8%	3.8%	3.8%	7.7%	100%	26
Child of immigrant from the Americas / Others	38.5%	0%	0%	38.5%	0%	15.4%	7.7%	0%	0%	100%	13
Foreign student from Europe	46.8%	3.2%	17.7%	6.5%	14.5%	3.2%	0%	1.6%	6.5%	100%	62
Foreign student from the Maghreb	8.6%	89.7%	0%	0%	0%	0%	1.7%	0%	0%	100%	58
Foreign student from Africa	1.9%	62.3%	11.3%	9.4%	0%	13.2%	0%	0%	1.9%	100%	53
Foreign student from Asia	48.1%	18.5%	0%	7.4%	0%	3.7%	0%	22.2%	0%	100%	27
Foreign student from the Americas / Others	51.9%	0%	25.9%	0%	0%	3.7%	0%	7.4%	11.1%	100%	27
Others	45.9%	24.3%	10.8%	5.4%	0%	5.4%	2.7%	2.7%	2.7%	100%	37
Total %	50%	20%	11%	5%	1%	3%	1%	1%	7%	100%	1.280
Totals	639	254	146	69	13	39	11	17	92	1.280	

Source: Questionnaires administered by the author.

Analyzing the group of French by origin, it is observed that the language criterion strongly distinguishes students who speak only French at home: 71.7% of them are non-believers. Among students who speak a non-European language, only 32.2% are non-believers, while those who speak a European language or Creole occupy an intermediate position: 54.6% are non-believers. The total number of French by origin who speak a European language at home is also twice as high as those who speak a non-European language. This relates to the history of immigration in France. In fact, it is known that in the 20th century, the first waves of migrants mainly came from European countries (Italy, Spain, Belgium, Poland, etc.), while after World War II except for the considerable exception of Portuguese immigration the waves primarily came from countries that were formerly colonized by

France (NOIRIEL, 1988). Additionally, there are migrations from French overseas territories, which play a significant role and would deserve a separate study. In fact, the percentage of believers is clearly higher in families where Creole is spoken, particularly Catholics, Christians, and Protestants. This group is also close to migrants from Haiti, the Dominican Republic, etc.

These changes in the nature of migration flows are also observed when comparing the totals of children of immigrants based on the father's nationality. In this group, children of European migrants make up only one-fifth of the total, with a significant proportion of Portuguese migrants. The comparison of non-belief rates among children of European immigrants confirms the lower religious belief of European migrant children (who are, however, more religious than French by origin who speak a European language). Regarding other migration flows, it is observed that children of migrants from the Maghreb and Sub-Saharan Africa believe in comparable proportions, while non-belief is clearly more prevalent among children of migrants from Asia and the Americas. What stands out is that the oppositions are found within the subgroup of foreign students from Asia and the Americas. However, they are slightly less religious than Europeans.

In terms of religious beliefs, children of immigrants occupy an intermediate position between French by origin and foreign students. Thus, the rate of non-belief drops from 32.2% among French by origin who speak a non-European language to 13.6% among children of Maghreb immigrants, to 8.6% among Maghreb foreign students, and 1.9% among Sub-Saharan African foreign students. It seems, therefore, as though there is a progressive process of religious acculturation among migrant populations that, over generations, and sometimes paradoxically through eventual returns to a religion perceived as “more authentic” due to its traditionalist traits, tend to move closer to the dominant religious model of the host society.

Paris 8 in the context of Parisian higher education

The overall distribution of the Paris 8 student body, consisting of a predominantly non-religious group that is often more liberal on matters of morals (for example, 88.9% of non-believers "accept" homosexuality, and this is also true for 76.1% of those who follow other non-institutionalized religions/beliefs), a Muslim-Protestant group that is much more traditionalist and

strict on matters of morals (19.3% of the former and 20.5% of the latter accept it), with frequently more intense religious practices, and finally, a small Catholic minority with low religious practice whose views on morals align more with those of non-believers (71.2% of them accept it), result from the unique history of each of these religions, whose temporalities also differ profoundly[14].

In fact, and at least since the 1980s, although the phenomenon is older, Catholicism has been in decline in France, contributing to the rapid increase in the proportion of non-believers in the French population (Table 2). The same is true for Catholic religious practice, which can be measured through Sunday Mass attendance, baptisms, religious weddings celebrated annually, children receiving catechism, etc. Catholicism is therefore facing a serious crisis of transmission, which is also clearly visible in the population that responded to the survey when comparing the religion of the students to that of their parents.

The churches are emptying, and the active social base of Catholicism is shrinking, seemingly concentrating particularly among practicing Catholics of bourgeois origin. Hence the existence of a particularly powerful social and religious circle in these circles, as well as the sentiment experienced by some priests, according to whom "Catholicism tends to increasingly blend with a certain bourgeois culture" (CLEUZIOU, 2014, p. 51). This growing numerical decline of Catholicism fuels the global phenomenon of secularization in French society and undoubtedly favors the development of identity-based reactions, notably illustrated by the emergence around 2010 of the concept of "catophobia"[15], clearly inspired by the concept of "Islamophobia." In contrast, after the 1980s, Islam, which is notably led by factions of the working class generally from immigration originating in the Maghreb and Sub-Saharan Africa, grew significantly to the point of becoming the second-largest religion in France (Table 2).

Similarly, as is the case globally, Evangelism is experiencing rapid expansion, especially in working-class neighborhoods that have a significant proportion of foreigners, which is well reflected in the spatial distribution of their places of worship. It is known that, in the context of French territory, the department of Seine-Saint-Denis, where the university studied is located, has the highest number of evangelical and Pentecostal churches. Since the early 2000s, these churches have multiplied

[14] For an overview of the different religions in France, see Zwilling (2019).

[15] From the original *"cathophobie"*, a set of negative judgments in opposition to Catholicism. [N.T.]

significantly, and their places of worship are usually located in marginal, interstitial spaces, and in buildings not initially intended for this purpose (DEJEAN, 2010). In fact, these are often former factories, shops, warehouses, workshops, decommissioned cinemas, and even, for some "black" and/or very minority ethnic churches, suburban pavilions that house what are sometimes referred to as "house churches," where worship (often very warm) is held in the participants' native language. This is usually followed by a meal during which traditional dishes from their country of origin are shared. These churches also frequently provide community support and refuge for newly arrived migrants.

This real estate infrastructure clearly shows the recent nature of its establishment, as well as its increased social and institutional precariousness, bringing them much closer to Muslim places of worship, which are also located in devalued urban spaces that reinforce the stigmatization of these religions. This strongly distinguishes them from Catholicism, whose places of worship methodically line the national territory and generally occupy a chosen square in both urban and rural spaces. The paradox is that these places of worship are increasingly less frequented by their "faithful".

But the religious conFiguretion of Paris 8 also results from both school and social segregation mechanisms put into practice since secondary education [16], contributing, from the very beginning, to the creation of "true school ghettos" (FELOUZIS, 2005, p. 12). Thus, some surveys show that, currently, due to heightened community reflexes, Catholic populations, but also Jewish ones the most devout are increasingly retreating into private education and therefore avoiding public secondary schools[17]. This is also the case, in fact, for many non-religious families, sufficiently equipped both culturally and economically, who wish to escape public schools, where, in some institutions, due to teachers' adaptation to their students, the level of academic rigor is lower than elsewher.

[16] It corresponds to the second cycle of Primary Education (from 5th to 9th grade) [N.T.]

[17] On this point, see especially the contributions by Bérengère Massignon: *L'enseignement privé catholique*, and Joëlle Allouche-Benayoun: *L'enseignement privé juif,* in the work coordinated by Beraud; Willaime (2009). In an earlier article, Héran (1996, p. 29) already emphasized that "the choice of a confessional private school – that is, the majority of choices in the private sector – is strongly linked to the level of religious involvement. Practicing households make this choice four times more frequently than indifferent households. […] Conversely, the active choice of public schools is partly linked to religious indifference." And the author concludes: "The value system of parents plays a central role."

These dynamics, both social, educational, and religious, cause the public education audience to polarize along religious lines between a group of "cultural" Catholics who are infrequent practitioners, often very ignorant about religion, as well as non-believers, and a Muslim group with clearly more intense and visible practices. And due to the recent development of this religion in France, as well as the cost of education in private institutions, there are very few private Muslim schools. In fact, in France, 95% of private schools are Catholic[18].

Combined with the class-based nature of the social recruitment of certain institutions and specializations, this explains why, currently in Paris, some public vocational high schools [19] host a particularly working-class population, with more than 70% of students being Muslim (FARHAT, 2016, p. 82). Hence, a kind of "Islamization" of the representation of religion in these institutions, largely imposed by the more visible practices of this religion (respect for Ramadan, and thus not attending the cafeteria at noon, refusal to consume pork, wearing the veil, etc.). This socio-religious conFiguretion undoubtedly explains the virulence of the debates surrounding secularism, the use of the veil, etc., in these public institutions, where their students do not necessarily feel "*Charlie*". (BATTAGLIA; FLO'CH, 2015)[20] It is noticeable that, at this moment, these institutions do not have any Muslim chapels[21] muçulmana, while they are common in prisons, as well as in the armed forces, which directly relates to the audience of the institutions involved. Conversely, and due to a very long historical heritage, Catholic chapels are numerous in public education [22].

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[18] It is also known that in 2013, 13.3% of primary school students were enrolled in private schools. However, this rate rises to 22.6% in Paris, which is a particularly bourgeois city, compared to 4.8% in Seine-Saint-Denis, the department where the University of Paris 8 is located. This percentage then rises to 21.2% in secondary education, still with a significant difference between Paris (30.7%) and Seine-Saint-Denis (13,4%). (FRANCE. Ministère de l'Éducation nationale, 2014, p. 79, 81, 99 e 93)

[19] They correspond to Secondary Schools. [N.T.]

[20] Regarding the more or less turbulent debates in educational institutions following the terrorist attack on January 7, 2015, against *Charlie Hebdo*, see Battaglia; Flo'ch (2015).

[21] From the original "aumônerie," meaning the place designated for worship within educational institutions, but also hospitals, prisons, etc. The "aumônier," in turn, refers to the ecclesiastical figure responsible for overseeing liturgical services. [N.T]

[22] Let us remember that in France: "The chapels of high schools were created on December 10, 1802, and the law of separation did not question their existence. (...) School chapels are currently governed by a circular from April 22, 1988, which stipulates that secondary schools, including day schools, may, if the parents of students request it, have a chaplaincy service, by right if they have a boarding school, based on the rector's decision in other cases. This possibility is theoretically open to all religions, but the chapels currently existing (around 4,000) are almost exclusively Catholic." (BERAUD; WILLAIME, op. cit., p. 67)

These social, educational, and consequently religious segregation dynamics continue in higher education, notably through the mediation of the "reputation" social, political, intellectual, etc., of each institution, thus functioning as an ideological filter that favors certain recruitments and excludes others. For example, the reputation of Paris 8 as a "left-wing university," even a far-left one, due to its intellectual avant-garde legacy post-68, known and valued in certain cultured and/or politically left-wing social circles, acts as a signal. This helps attract particularly militant and secular students, usually from the intellectual petty bourgeoisie of the public sector, both from the provinces and abroad, or dissatisfied with the conservatism of more traditional institutions. When local social movements arise, these students often form a large part of the political vanguard. This vanguard is frequently eager to bring along working-class Muslim students who confront class differences, as well as differences of opinion on morals and religion.

Similarly, the significant proportion of foreign students, as well as children of immigrants at Paris 8, makes it an attractive place, even a refuge, for some of them. For example, Salima, a 23-year-old student with a professional bachelor's degree enrolled in the second year of sociology, but living in a very bourgeois neighborhood in Paris where, she says, "there are no foreigners," and having often been harassed on the street because of her veil, explains: "Only at Paris 8 do I feel safe (laughs). With all these people from outside, and many girls with veils. You see, I feel more comfortable here than in my own city, which is just 30 minutes away, not even that (laughs)"[23]. The same happens with many foreign students attracted by the particularly cosmopolitan recruitment of this university, who often come to join compatriots or family already living in the Paris region.

Conversely, this reputation, this social and educational recruitment, etc., contributes to distancing more devout and practicing Catholic students, who are often more politically oriented to the right, and who spontaneously choose, especially (when they have the necessary academic and economic resources), other more traditional and elitist institutions in central Paris, as well as more

[23] Interview conducted by Myriam Dekhil. Regarding religion in Maghreb families, see Khaldi (2008).

socially and economically valued courses, such as law or medicine, or private higher education institutions.

These "choosing minorities," as François Héran calls them, who can be either believers or non-believers, oriented to the left or to the right, thus continue the segregative logics in practice in secondary education. They contribute to the relative ideological homogenization of institutions and, therefore, to the production of more or less heavy local political conformities shaped by their respective minorities, making some institutions a priori perceived as "left-wing" and others as "right-wing".

While the avoidance of Paris 8 by practicing Catholics from higher social backgrounds leaves no doubt, the same is true for other minorities, such as religious and practicing Jews, who, despite the geographical proximity of Sarcelles, sometimes referred to as the "first Jewish city in France"[24], never enroll in an institution often perceived as particularly "pro-Palestinian" (BRAFMAN, 2014). This can be attributed to their political history (constant engagement, from the beginning, with the Palestinian cause), as well as the particularities of their audience (the importance of the Maghreb diaspora). For this reason, the rare Jews found there are usually secular Jews, mostly of Ashkenazi origin, and some heirs of the left-wing, even far-left, political-intellectual engagement of their ancestors from the 60s/70s, who played a key role in 1968[25]. They also seem to be increasingly in the minority today, notably due to the political shift to the right within this community, as well as the current religious reversal initiated by the techouvah movement (return to Judaism and the full observance of the biblical law), and an increasing communal shift related to the contemporary return of anti-Semitism in France (ALLOUCHE-BENAYOUN , 2009. p. 197).

[24] According to Sylvie Strudel (2000, p. 167): "Nationally estimated at 1% of the total population, the Jewish population would represent 17 to 20% of the local population in Sarcelles, or 10 to 12,000 people," knowing that it is essentially composed of Sephardic Jews of working-class origin, particularly from Tunisia.

[25] Thus, at the time, Daniel Cohn-Bendit, one of the student leaders of May 68, also of Jewish origin, could jokingly write that "In France, the national leaderships of far-left groups could speak Yiddish, even if they didn't agree with each other (COHN-BENDIT, 1975, p. 11)

Small deviation through two major school

By concentrating a large number of higher education institutions, particularly the most prestigious ones, the Paris region displays the effects of segregation, with particularly powerful hierarchies. While this point is already well-documented concerning its social and educational recruitment[26], there is no recent survey focused on the relationship of Parisian students with religion, allowing for the positioning of Paris 8 within this space. One must go back to the 1960s to find two quantitative surveys that allow for a comparison of the religiosity of the public at different colleges, but also at schools[27], showing that before 1968, this space was already sharply divided. On one side, there were the faculties of arts and humanities and the sciences at the University of Paris (whose social recruitment was also more popular), as well as the Écoles normales supérieures, where the rate of non-believers reached its peak. On the other side, there were the faculties of medicine, law, the École des Hautes Études Commerciales, the École Nationale d'Administration, the École Polytechnique, and Sciences Po Paris, whose social recruitment was clearly higher, and where the rate of non-believers was particularly low[28].

Before 1968, and from the student perspective, higher education was therefore strongly divided both religiously and socially. And, due to a homology effect often evidenced, the same occurred on the teaching side. Thus, the survey conducted by Pierre Bourdieu and his team in 1967 with tenured professors from Parisian faculties shows that the social origin of professors in arts and sciences is more popular than that of professors in law, economics, and especially medicine. The rate of "notorious Catholics" rises from 7.8% in sciences, 19.2% in arts, 21.8% in law to peak at 41.6% in medicine (BOURDIEU, 1984, p. 66). These recruitment differences, as well as ideological orientations, would not be without effect during May 68. The faculties of arts (notably the Sorbonne arts), sciences, as well as the Écoles normales supérieures, would be at the forefront of the

[26] For a recent study focused on Parisian universities, see Frouillou (2017).

[27] The first is by Glorieux, Grandval, and Rey-Herme (1966), titled *The Student and Religion*. The second is by Pierre Bourdieu and Monique de Saint-Martin (1987), which does not specifically address the subject, but provides comparative data for the major schools.

[28] Regarding the rates of non-believers in these schools, see Bourdieu; Saint-Martin, op. cit., p. 50.

"movement." Meanwhile, law, medicine, and the major scientific, economic, and political schools would "mobilize" belatedly. All of this raises questions about the effect of socio-religious affiliations on the political engagement of students, as well as their professors, during May 68: a somewhat taboo but highly intriguing subject. Knowing that, although they were a minority, left-wing Catholics and Protestants also played an important role at the time[29].

Figure 1 - Slogan written in May 68 at the Sorbonne Chapel

(How to think freely in the shadow of a chapel?)

Photo by Christian Lemaire.

Currently, there is no systematic survey regarding the religiosity of students or professors in Parisian higher education today. However, some indicators suggest that, at the top of Parisian higher education, particularly in the preparatory classes and grandes écoles, Catholicism still occupies a place of choice, while Protestantism, Judaism, and Islam, on the other hand, are almost invisible. For example, it is known that the Henri IV, Louis-le-Grand, and Saint-Louis high schools—considered the flagship institutions of secular public education and republican elitism, where most students of the grandes écoles are formed—each have a Catholic chapel within their walls; that these chapels are active, and that at Henri IV high school, for instance, the chapel gathers many students weekly, particularly from the literary preparatory classes and the School of Chartres. This unexpected discovery, which initially surprised us, later led us to inquire about two institutions: the École

[29] Regarding the students, see: Pagis (2010/1). And for a historical perspective, see Pelletier; Schlegel (2012).

Normale Supérieure (ENS) on Rue d'Ulm and Sciences Po Paris. Two elite institutions chosen because of their religious stance in the 1960s, but also because, compared to Paris 8, they are situated at the opposite end of the Parisian academic field in terms of their social and educational recruitment.

In his history of the Catholic chapel at the ENS, Baptiste Coulmont (1997, p. 16) writes that between 1955 and 1962, the "tala" group (a slang term used by students to refer to those who attend mass) seems "very active, recruiting about one-third of each graduating class." After 1968, it was merely a shadow of its former self, with this decline explained by the politicization of life at the ENS, which had "caused a group that was finally quite heterogeneous to implode"[30]. And, in a classic move balancing politics and religion, it was through the retreat of this politicization (the dissolution of the Communist Student Union cell at the ENS, the decline of political posters in the school corridors...) and a religious revival affecting all the Catholic chapels in France [31], that it was reintroduced in March 1981 at the ENS, at the initiative of Father Jean-Robert Armogathe. He is a former normalien, a graduate in letters, a Doctor of State in philosophy, as well as a director of studies at the École Pratique des Hautes Études and the director of the international Catholic theological journal *Communio*.

Currently, this chapel, whose audience consists of half men and half women, one-third science students and two-thirds humanities and social sciences students, with a significant proportion of students in classical studies (Latin, Greek) and philosophy, some of whom also attended non-mixed Catholic high schools, is very active. Its life is primarily centered around the weekly religious service held on Thursday evenings (referred to as "Thursday tala") at the neighboring convent of the Sisters of the Reparative Adoration on Rue Gay-Lussac, attracting between 30 and 40 people. The atmosphere there is particularly fervent, and during our observation on February 25, 2016, the priest was wearing a Roman collar, which attests to a certain traditionalism. To our great surprise, nearly

[30] Ibid., p. 16.

[31] Indeed, according to Gérard Cholvy, it was in the late 1970s that student chapels began to reemerge. For example, the Chartres pilgrimage, organized each year by university chaplains in the Île-de-France region, and sometimes referred to as the "barometer of French Catholicism," saw a resurgence of participation in the early 1980s. According to Cholvy, participation in this pilgrimage peaked at 18,000 students in 1959, dropped to 3,000 by the late 1970s, and then rose to 5,000 in 1985. However, it is known that during this period, the number of students enrolled in higher education in France increased nearly fivefold (CHOLVY, 1999, p. 326 e 351)

half of the attendees spent a good portion of the mass on their knees (the floor, however, was covered in carpet). During this (somewhat participatory) observation, we felt quite relieved. In fact, despite our Catholic cultural background, we had the impression of invading the shared intimacy, and thus the social "among themselves," of the people we observed.

The ENS chapel also has a small oratory adorned with Orthodox icons located in the school's basement, in the Rataud building, where the two "princes" and two "princesses tala," chosen by their peers to organize the chapel's life in connection with the chaplain, lead praise chants every morning at 8 AM, except on Sundays, and sometimes hold evening meetings. It also announces the weddings of former "talas." It organizes "restarting weekends" and participates in pilgrimages, such as the annual one to Chartres or the "summer marches" to visit "the cardinal points of Latin Christianity," including Rome, Assisi, Compostela, and Jerusalem, etc.

Furthermore, we note that, since the early 1990s, with three issues per year, these students, some of whom come from literary preparatory classes, endowed with rare skills in Greek and Latin, which give them privileged access to canonical texts, actively contribute to a highly regarded theological journal titled *Sénevé*, jointly published by the ENS chapel and the École Nationale des Chartes. This chapel also organizes lecture cycles. For example, the 2014-2015 cycle was titled "What must I do to have eternal life?" and aimed to address the question "Fundamental morality." The study of its program highlights the importance of moral concerns, especially sexual and family morality, among the new generations of "talas".

Similarly, endogamous unions, that is, between "talas," seem very common in this environment. Here is what J.-R. Armogathe says:

> I more frequently perform marriages between believers, where the couple has not had sexual relations before marriage and envisions starting a stable Catholic home, with more children than the national average. Between believers and non-believers, the distance has increased significantly over the past twenty years (ARMOGATHE, 2001. p. 136)

Thus, it is noticeable that these students share moral concerns with Muslim students or evangelical Protestants, who are the most devout at Paris 8. These concerns place them at the opposite end of the LGBT movements, which, in fact, are led by students from very different social backgrounds.

Speaking about the evolution of tala spirituality over the past thirty years, J.-R. Armogathe explains that in the 1980s, the emphasis had already shifted to the convivial and fraternal aspects: "Little by little, as if after a period of persecution, young Christians timidly raised their heads and were happy to find themselves in small, warm, and pious groups." (ARMOGATHE, 2001, p. 125) While today's students are very much attached

> to the beauty of the chants, the altar, and the chapel, to a certain hieratic nature in the celebration. Many practice, either alone or in groups, the daily recitation of the breviary, prayer in the Church in the morning ("praise songs") and in the evening ("meetings" before the evening meal). They are very devoted to the Holy Scripture and are eager for exegesis conference (ARMOGATHE, 2001. p. 127).

Thus, the very significant contribution, when considering the modesty of these totals, of this institution focused on the production of religious vocations becomes clear. This phenomenon can be quantified with the help of the Annual Alumni Directory of the School, which shows that the ENS produces about one vocation per year, which is not negligible in a particularly depressed French context where only 120 priests are ordained each year.

In its own way, and even though the principle of secularism requires it to remain discreet, the ENS on Rue d'Ulm continues to contribute to the reproduction of a Catholic intellectual elite, which, due to demographic, social, and historical reasons, is difficult to find an equivalent in other religions. In fact, these very minority religions lack their formidable private school infrastructure inherited from a multi-century history. And, at first glance, in the case of Islam, it is undoubtedly one of the most poorly served. With its particularly popular recruitment, this strongly influences the collective perception of this religion and the type of religiosity it conveys. One can also mention the particularly sensitive issue currently being debated, that of "self-proclaimed *imams*"[32], or those sent to the migrants' countries of origin to maintain control over these populations, and hence the construction

[32] *Imam, imame, or imam is a Muslim title that designates the priest responsible for leading prayers in the mosque, as well as a spiritual guide*. [N.T.]

of a national system for training *imams* aimed at fostering the emergence of an "Islam of France" to combat sectarian or terrorist deviations[33].

This persistent Catholic anchorage, tending to make some grandes écoles conservatories of Catholicism, is even more evident at Sciences Po Paris, that is, at a “free” (and thus private) school of political science created precisely after the Commune in 1871 by the Parisian liberal bourgeoisie, which paradoxically now trains many future *énarques*[34], high-ranking civil servants, but also company executives, journalists, etc. In fact, the Catholic chapel at Sciences Po (the "Saint Guillaume Center"), located just a few steps from the ENA and surrounded by particularly chic fashion boutiques in the Quartier Latin, is very active. It spans a ground floor and an upper floor, including a religious library and a small oratory, and is open every day of the week from 8 AM to 7:15 PM. In 2015, it had no less than four chaplains responsible for responding to the students' requests. One can very easily find a Jesuit priest there, "sent on a mission to the grandes écoles." Jesuits have always had a very active policy of investing in these schools, a sector deemed particularly strategic in winning over minds. This priest mainly handles "marriage preparations," can hear confessions, be chosen as a "spiritual father" by students eager to deepen their faith, or wishing to join the clergy. It also seems that, like at the ENS, Sciences Po produces about one religious vocation per year.

In fact, the "Saint Guillaume Center" is the oldest and most important student association at Sciences Po, and its operation is notably supported by donations from alumni (700 in 2008). Like the ENS, its life is marked by a weekly Mass held every Thursday evening at the Jesuit building, followed by a meal and then conferences. This chapel also publishes an annual magazine after 2010, titled *Kerygme*, a Greek term meaning "the proclamation of the initial faith of Christians." It is entirely written by students; the 2015 edition was titled "Faith Through the Filter of Atheism." It also invests in many charitable activities and organizes "retreats" within the framework of the "Christians in the Grandes Écoles" network created in 1985, which, according to its website, in 2016 had no less than 80 chapels, 110 schools, and 3,000 students.

[33] On this point, see Jouanneau (2013).

[34] Student or former student of the National School of Administration. [N.T.]

The Catholic anchoring of Sciences Po is therefore old and powerful. Thanks to a survey conducted by Anne Muxel and her team in 2002, that is, in a period comparable to ours, we can compare the religious beliefs of its students to those of the students at Paris 8. (MUXEL, 2004)[35]

Table 4 - The religious affiliation of students at Sciences Po Paris in 2002 and at Paris 8 Vincennes-Saint-Denis in 2005.

	Paris 8 Vincennes-Saint-Denis	**Political Science Paris**
No religion, atheist, no response.	49.9%	40%
Muslims	19.8%	2%
Catholics	11.4%	43%
Christians	5.4%	/
Protestants	3%	5%
Jewishs	0.9%	4%
Other religions, beliefs	9.5%	5%
Total %	100%	100%

Source: Questionnaires administered by the author.

Thus, the students of Sciences Po clearly identify as more religious than those at Paris 8. Then, as expected, Catholicism dominates at Sciences Po, with the proportion of Catholics nearly four times higher than at Paris 8, closely resembling what is observed in some sectors of private Catholic secondary education, where Sciences Po appears as an extension to higher education. Conversely, Islam, the majority religion at Paris 8, is almost non-existent at Sciences Po, while other minority religions such as Protestantism and Judaism are relatively well represented [36].

[35] But, unlike ours, Anne Muxel's survey covers all levels of study. Additionally, the question asked about religion is also different: "Could you tell us what your religion is, if you have one?" This introduces some possible biases.

[36] Regarding the Protestant group, the absence of the "Christians" category at Sciences Po makes the comparison more delicate. It is known that many of them are Evangelicals, a group that is undoubtedly underrepresented in this school, with the majority being Lutherans and Reformed, among which one must find children of what was once called the "high Protestant society." (HSP).

Regarding Sciences Po, these results can be explained by the strongly class-based nature of the recruitment at this institution, as well as the historical importance of the Catholic bourgeoisie at its core, which undoubtedly contributes to the production of a form of "in-group" often highly criticized. In 2002, 73.7% of its students were children of upper-class professionals and liberal professions, compared to 23.2% at Paris 8. Similarly, 73% of the parents of students at this school attended higher education, compared to 26.8% at Paris 8. (MUXEL, 2004. p. 211 e 241)[37] Therefore, here too, foreigners who come primarily from wealthy countries and mostly from Christian backgrounds (in decreasing order: Germany, the United States, Italy, Poland, Great Britain, etc.) are clearly more religious (69%) than the French (57%)[38].

Not only is Sciences Po more religious than Paris 8, but its students are distinguished by the intensity of their religious practice. In fact, 31% of the French Catholics at this school are regular practitioners. Similarly, 11% of Sciences Po students are part of a religious association or movement. (MUXEL, 2004. p. 153)[39] his is also exceptional and does not occur without political consequences. In fact, Anne Muxel emphasizes that the proportion of Catholics, and even more so of practicing Catholics, is particularly high among right-wing students. While it is three times lower among left-wing students. Similarly, the rate of non-religious individuals is 17% on the right compared to 57% on the left. The author concludes by writing that "religious practice remains one of the best predictors of electoral behavior." (MUXEL, 2004. p. 154)

Return on a scientific pedagogical experience

In 2005, when we embarked on the study of the religious beliefs of students at Paris 8, our goal was to better understand their relationship with religion. More specifically, and within the framework of a pedagogical approach aimed primarily at initiating them effectively into sociology based on what they are and their intimate experience with the social world, we wanted to understand why religion

[37] Regarding Paris 8, the percentages come from the 2005 survey.

[38] As for Paris 8 in our survey, 80% of students are French, 10% are from Maghreb and Sub-Saharan Africa, 5.6% are from Europe, 2.9% from Asia, and 2.1% from the Americas or other places. In comparison, in 2002, 75.4% of students at Sciences Po were French, 17% European, and 8% non-European, with students from Maghreb and Sub-Saharan Africa making up less than 0.6% of the total. (MUXEL, 2004, p. 209)

[39] One informant also highlights the importance of scouting among many Catholic students at Sciences Po, playing a decisive role in the formation of religious vocations. Currently, many priests and monks have gone through this youth organization.

held such an evident role for many of them and what purpose it served in their lives. This then led us to dive into a course on the sociology of religions, where we explored the work of Max Weber and especially developed the concepts of "life conduct" (Lebensführung), "salvation goods" (Heilsgüter), which we felt were particularly suited to understand the importance of orthopraxy issues, as well as soteriology, among many believing students. We also read the Quran, the Bible, etc., to develop our religious culture and, within what is feasible, to try to put ourselves in their shoes.

The reading of these "sacred" texts was also very important because, in addition to allowing us to enrich the course by providing examples of prophecies and acts illustrating Weberian mechanisms of prophecy, it enabled us to more effectively discover the esoteric, contradictory, etc. character of these texts. Moreover, it prompted us to question the intellectual conditions under which they are received by the students, as well as by their parents, many of whom, by the way, did not study or master classical Arabic, etc. (WEBER, 2005, p. 58) It also led us to reflect on the modalities of popular faith and what Pierre Bourdieu calls fides implicita, which often does not come with theoretical justifications, as many religions indeed ask their followers to make the "sacrifice of intellect".

This approach, which could be described as "comprehensive," allowed us to gain a certain familiarity with the subject of religion, speak more casually in the course despite it being a topic that could sometimes be quite heavy, and also discover that the religious culture of the students was often very limited[40]. Hence, to our great surprise, the "sociology of religions" course sometimes turned into a simple "religion course" for some students, who were concerned with rationalizing/reorganizing what, borrowing a Weberian expression, could be called their small "personal spiritual edifice".

From the very beginning, this desire to understand, if possible from the inside, led us to research the prayer practices of the students, which, here also with surprise, we found to generally be effective (in fact, most students believe their prayers are answered, which therefore raises questions about the

[40] However, the interviews revealed that the ability to speak at length and in a reasoned manner about one's religion is closely linked to the amount of educational capital held by the students. This highlights the importance of articulating the sociology of religion and the sociology of education.

particularly performative nature of this practice), as well as the so-called "magical" practices/beliefs (such as belief in the "evil eye," which we found to be prevalent in the Muslim community, but not only there, especially among the more devout, while Protestants strongly distrust it, and more academically gifted students believe little in it). This was combined with a more "explanatory" approach based mainly on a questionnaire survey, which allowed us to objectify the social determinants of religious beliefs.

And it is primarily the discovery of the striking differences in the relationship with religion among the students at Paris 8 based on their origins, the courses they took, etc., as well as a Bourdieusian theoretical inspiration in terms of "field," that led us to move beyond our initial monographic framework, in which we felt somewhat confined to a form of social, political, and intellectual "among themselves," in order to explore what occurs in secondary education, as well as in the elite Parisian schools.

Little by little, we discovered how much our ethnocentrism as non-believers, amplified by being a professor at a left-wing university inheriting a politically intellectual tradition, was often very critical of religion, frequently qualified (sometimes with some condescension) as the "opium of the people." This ethnocentrism, combined with a form of secular refusal (very French) of the religious fact, was blinding[41]. It mainly prevented us from perceiving the extent of the formidable historical-religious commitment inherent to our country, which is exemplified, for instance, in its school system particularly built through an "educational war" opposing "free schools" and public schools, a conflict that is now somewhat forgotten but was particularly intense under the Third Republic as well as in the persistent Catholic anchoring of some of its elites. This commitment is now being shaken by the rapid decline of Catholicism, the increase in disbelief, and the dynamism of popular religions, such as Islam and evangelical Protestantism, which are particularly present in the most marginalized zones of the social, educational, and university spaces.

This survey thus allowed us to understand that in order to grasp the complexity of the religious dynamics at play in the student environment, it is necessary to combine monographic and comparative approaches, as well as qualitative and quantitative methods, the sociology of education, and the

[41] Regarding the scientific and secular rejection of religion and the intellectual distortions that result from it, see the dialogued introduction by Pierre Bourdieu with Jacques Maître (1984, p. XI and following).

sociology of religions, etc. It also allowed us to reposition this complexity within the framework of the long-term history of religions and the educational system involved. These histories, often studied separately due to scientific specialization and, furthermore, forgotten primarily because of what Pierre Bourdieu called the "amnesia of genesis" (BOURDIEU, 2001, p. 7), are crucial. Undoubtedly, one of the main virtues of social and historical sciences is to allow us to reclaim our collective history, thereby providing the means for us to be a little more lucid and free.

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