Religion Does Matter (But It's Only Half the Story)

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Abstract

Perry (2023) argues that sociology has marginalized the study of religion, producing bad science, excluding religious minorities, and eroding public trust. I agree, but argue this is only half the story. Sociology has neglected not only religion's institutional, ideological, and demographic dimensions, but its experiential core: the "connection experience" (CE) that James and Maslow identified as the bedrock of all religious life. Drawing on recent prevalence data and interdisciplinary research, I demonstrate that CE is ubiquitous, neurologically real, and socially consequential, identifying six mutually reinforcing barriers to its sociological study: institutional blind spots, pathologization, credibility traps, epistemological threat, class-based suppression, and paradigm policing. I conclude that sociology is uniquely equipped to examine how social stratification, gender, and power shape the triggering, interpretation, and political consequences of CE. A reprioritized sociology of religion must therefore study both the ecclesiastic shell and the mystical spark or remain by its own standards inadequate.

Keywords: religion, mysticism, connection experience, sociology of religion, noesis, social stratification, gender, Perry

> Most authorities on Indigenous spirituality write about ceremonies and rituals, totems and dreamings and their social implications. It is a materialist view of what spirituality is, and although they speak about 'religion', they do not seem very concerned about the deep innermost feelings which give rise to religion in the first place." **Mudrooroo** (1995:34).
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> Let's face it, these hidden laws [of mysticism] are hidden, but they are only hidden by [your] own ignorance. And the word mystical is just arrived at through people's ignorance. There's nothing mystical about it, only that you're ignorant of what that entails" — **George Harrison**

Introduction

In "Religion Matters (And Doesn't Go Away When Sociologists Ignore It)," Samuel L. Perry (2023) makes a case that should be uncontroversial but is, in the current disciplinary climate, almost radical: religion remains among the most powerful and pervasive forms of social behaviour on the planet, yet academic sociology has systematically marginalized its study, focusing narrowly, when it does pay attention, on the ecclesiastic, dogmatic, and social aspects of religion while excluding religion's other important functions, like providing meaning, facilitating connection with the transcendent, or generating profound emotional, experiential, and mystical states (Smith 2003).

Perry documents the consequences of this neglect with precision. When sociologists abdicate the study of religion, we do not simply leave a research gap, we cede the public understanding of a fundamental social force to "politicians, pundits, and grifters" (Perry, 2023, p. 1456). We produce bad science by obscuring a tremendous portion of social behaviour. We exclude religious minorities and students of colour who perceive the secular academy as hostile terrain (Scheitle et al., 2021, as cited in Perry, 2023). Finally, we erode professional and public trust in sociology and sociologists, especially among those who lean right, the very people who should

be reading our work (Perry, 2023). It's true that far-right ideologues have worked hard to create suspicion and distrust in science and scholarship, but we should not be helping them do their work.

Perry attributes this neglect to a confluence of factors that extend beyond mere theoretical missteps. **First**, he points to a **lack of personal relevance and interest**; because sociologists are disproportionately secular, they often project their own disinterest onto the broader public, mistakenly deeming the topic unimportant, with predictable consequences on student development. **Second**, and more critically, Perry presents empirical evidence of **bias and prejudice**. His own survey experiment reveals that sociologists who associate religion specialists with being "religious" or "conservative" systematically downgrade the entire subfield, rating it as less rigorous and less deserving of space in top journals or departments. This "Regnerus Effect," a suspicion that religion scholars are covertly introducing a conservative agenda, is compounded by a "prototypicality" problem that also marginalizes racial, religious, and gender minorities both within the discipline *and* as objects of study. The Sociology of Religion would be a lot different if, say, an Aboriginal from Australia who studied Aboriginal religious practices found welcome in a Sociology department as a religious scholar. **Third**, Perry acknowledges that **institutional structures** have played a role, as specialized organizations and journals for the sociology of religion have, perhaps unintentionally, insulated the subfield and pulled scholars away from the disciplinary mainstream. Fourth, neglect may also be associated with the general acceptance of Marxian dismissals of religion as a tool of the accumulating class, an opiate delivered to the working classes as painkiller and anaesthetic and the belief that, as a superstition, the institution will inevitably decline as the planet marches forward into a scientifically rooted secular future (the so called secularization thesis). Why bother to study something that is unimportant and that will shortly go away?[1]

1As it turns out, and as Berger has admitted, sociologists jumped to conclusion here (Berger 1999). Church attendance may have been in decline, but individuals still pursued meaning, connection, and transformation, only in private and with individualized, hybrid (McGuire 2008), and commercialized systems (Carrette and King 2008) .

It’s a remarkable thing, really, especially for critical sociologists. Sociologists say that religion is a tool that anaesthetizes the masses and then promptly ignore its study as such. To say this is to say that religion is a powerful thing, which it is. Technically, we’ve (sociologists) known this from the very beginning of our discipline. Auguste Comte thought religion so important and so powerfully capable of “directing the pacific activity of man” (Comte 1852:6) that he actually tried to start his own religion, specifically for the purpose of controlling human behaviour! There’s no other way to say it but that religion is a big deal. If it is an anaesthetic, then it seems to me that the why’s and wherefores of the anaesthetization process would be of considerable concern to the discipline. Yet we remain silent about arguably the biggest, most pervasive, “tool” in the chest. If it can direct the pacific activity of humanity like Comte said, we should maybe take a closer look.

Compounding these social, institutional, and theoretical factors is a fundamental conceptual failure at the very heart of the enterprise: sociologists have demonstrated a remarkable inability to agree upon a coherent and binding definition of their core subject (Davie 2013). Unlike more established domains such as the study of class or the state, the sociology of religion has been perpetually fragmented by a definitional chaos that ranges from overly narrow, substantive definitions focusing on belief in gods or the supernatural which exclude non-theistic traditions like Buddhism or secular spiritualities (McGuire 2008), to overly broad, functionalist definitions that categorize any system of ultimate meaning (including nationalism or consumerism) as a religion, thereby risking the concept's analytical usefulness by making it synonymous with "culture" or "ideology." This lack of a stable, shared definition has not only hampered cumulative theoretical progress but has perpetuated the subfield's marginalization as it allows critics to dismiss it as studying a nebulous, ill-defined object (Guhin 2014). Mainstream sociologists can comfortably relegate the "problem" of religion to a specialized corner where their superstitious, space-cadet colleagues hang out, thereby avoiding the difficult task of confronting what religion actually is and how it operates as a distinct and pervasive social force.

Be all that as it may, Perry is right. Sociologists treat religion like they’d treat a dirty nappy, nose held, arm stretched out; nevertheless, religion does matter and sociology's collective suspicion

toward it has damaged the entire discipline's credibility and its explanatory power. Perry calls for a reprioritization: hire religion scholars, fund religion research, platform it, and reward it.

To this we say yes, without reservation.

But, if we are going to do this right, if we are going to produce what Perry calls "social science worthy of the name," we must recognize that Perry's call, necessary as it is, is only half the story. Sociology has neglected not only the institutional, ideological, and demographic dimensions of religion. Sociology has also neglected the *experiential* dimension of religion: the mystical encounter, the peak experience, the moment of connection that William James (1903) identified as the "bedrock and foundation" of all religion, and that Abraham Maslow (2012:352) described as the "private, lonely, personal illumination, revelation, or ecstasy" from which every high religion draws its validity. I prefer to call this phenomenon *connection experience r*ather than “mystical experience” because the term that strips away the esoteric baggage of "mysticism" while preserving the core phenomenological reality: a discrete, often transformative human experience of profound connection to something greater than the isolated self, *frequently* accompanied by noetic insight, positive emotion, and lasting behavioural change (Miller 2004; Miller and Baca 2001; Vaillant 2002).

Indeed, Sociology has not merely ignored this dimension; it has ignored it *harder* than it has ignored religion itself, despite initial interest. A decade after William James (1903) published his landmark study of mystical experience, Troeltsch (1931) appended mysticism to the church-sect typology and urged sociologists to investigate all three forms. Max Weber, too, recognized the independent force of charisma and inner-worldly asceticism. Yet within a generation, sociology developed what Garrett (1975:206) called a “parochial—concentration on ecclesiastic institutions,” and the concept of mysticism suffered “wholehearted neglect” at the hands of sociological investigators. That neglect remains as true today as it was four decades ago. There has been sporadic interest here and there (Bourque 1969; Bourque and Back 1968, 1971) , but for the most part sociologists, when they bothered to study the nappy at all, did so with a "parochial—concentration on ecclesiastic institutions" while allowing the phenomenon of

connection experience to experience thorough and "wholehearted neglect" (Garrett 1975:206). The result is a sociology of religion that studies the surface, the shell, the social organization, the demographic correlates, etc., while remaining largely blind to not only the moving mechanics of the institution, but the fascinating spark that generates the shell in the first place, *and* the human hands that shape that shell into an opiate, anaesthetic, or whatever.

Not a Minor Omission

Let us be clear here. This is not a minor omission. Connection experience, brief connections to "something more" than your "normal" individuated, egoic consciousness (i.e., nature, other people, discarnate entities, even God and the Cosmos), is not a fringe human experience, it is a core one. To be blunt, most people have these experiences (Sosteric 2018a). Recent large-scale survey research confirms this. A 2023 Pew Research Center study found that 45% of U.S. adults report having had a sudden or unexpected feeling of connection with something from beyond this world, while 71% say they feel a deep sense of wonder about the universe at least several times a year and 66% report a deep sense of spiritual peace and well-being with similar frequency (Pew Research Center 2023). These figures are not confined to the United States. A 2022 nationwide Brazilian study of over 1,000 participants found that 92% reported at least one spiritual or religious experience in their lifetime, 47.5% experienced such events frequently, and 35% reported having had at least one connection experience (Monteiro de Barros 2022). Even when researchers use stricter definitional criteria, the prevalence remains striking. In a 2019 survey of 809 individuals who reported a "God encounter experience" without the use of psychedelic drugs, approximately half fulfilled the criteria for a complete connection experience, and more than two-thirds of those who identified as atheist before the experience no longer did so afterwards (Griffiths et al. 2019). Maslow (2012) eventually concluded that virtually everyone has peak experiences; the "non-peaker" is not someone incapable of the experience but someone afraid of it, who suppresses or denies it. The empirical picture is consistent across methodologies and continents: these experiences are not rare; they are not pathology (in fact they are often healing); they are not esoteric outliers. They are a routine, if badly understood, feature of human life.

Sustained Scholarly Interest

In addition to the ubiquity of the experience, a thing that should itself alert the astute student of sociology, there has been sustained, if marginal, scholarly interest across disciplines. Philosopher Stace defended its study, calling connection experience "a psychological fact of which there is abundant evidence" and "To deny or doubt that it exists as a psychological fact is…. ignorance and 'very stupid'" (Stace 1960:14). Long before that, esteemed founding father of psychology William James felt connection experience was the bedrock and foundation of all religion (James 1903:6). Abraham Maslow, founder of Humanistic and Transpersonal Psychology, said that "The very beginning, the intrinsic core, the essence, the universal nucleus of every known high religion … has been the private, lonely, personal illumination, revelation, or ecstasy of some acutely sensitive prophet or seer" (Maslow, 2012, p. 339). Proudfoot said religion "is not just a set of creedal statements or a collection of rites…." "Religion has always been an experiential matter" (Proudfoot 1985:xi). Heriot-Maitland (2008:302) states connection experience constitutes the very essence of religion, "such that the origin of a given tradition can often be traced to an initial transcendent encounter, moment of revelation, salvation, or enlightenment." Psychologists study it, honing in on the healing power of connection experience (Miller 2004; Vaillant 2002).

Even hard-nosed physicists find the phenomenon real enough to talk about it, and judging by their mystical meanderings (Wilber 2001), have probably had connection experiences. Einstein himself may be cautiously describing his own connection experience when he says that "religious feeling takes the form of a rapturous amazement at the harmony of natural law, which reveals an intelligence of such superiority that, compared with it, all the systematic thinking and acting of human beings is an utterly insignificant reflection." (Einstein 1971:91). Einstein's account above reads like a classic account of a connection experience, with its strong positive emotions (Pahnke 1963) like rapture and awe (Hood 1975) and its strong statements of "something greater" than the little self, in this case a vast and superior intelligence which he called the "Old One" (Einstein 1971:91), not an anthropomorphized abusive white patriarch in the sky, but a non-personified, impersonal intelligence synonymous with the sublime and

rational order of the universe itself. Classical physicists like Bohr, Heisenberg, and others subscribed to similar philosophical positions in order to make sense of what they were observing. Their beliefs also came in the form of a fantastically intelligent central “order”, “source”, or “fabric” of reality (Wilber 2001).

To top it all off, the phenomenon has recently been established as a neurological fact (Newberg 2006; Newberg, d’Aquile, and Rause 2001). As such it shapes mental health (Jager Meezenbroek et al. 2012; Mahoney and Pargament 2004), family life, political engagement, and even revolutionary social change (Sosteric 2018b, 2020).

What more do you need?

Reasons for Sociological Neglect

Perry asked why sociologists have ignored religion in general. We can now ask a more specific question. Why have sociologists ignored connection experience? I would argue that the durability stems from a mutually reinforcing set of barriers, institutional, psychological, political, and epistemological, that make the phenomenon of connection experience doubly marginal: too religious for a secular academy, too subjective for a positivist discipline, and too volatile for a field deeply invested in the status quo.

The institutional blind spot. First, sociology is institutionally configured to study public, organized, and measurable phenomena. Churches, denominations, and religious markets leave traces—membership rolls, budgets, voting blocs—that fit comfortably into surveys and regression tables. Connection experience, by contrast, is perceived as private, episodic, and non-institutionalized. It offers no administrative data to mine, no groups to study. As Garrett (1975) noted, sociology’s concentration on ecclesiastic structures meant that the non-public, non-institutionalized dimension of religion simply fell off the research map.

The pathology frame. Second, when mysticism is noticed, it is often pathologized. Sociologists and psychologists alike have long struggled to accept that “normal people can believe, and

believe sincerely, they have communicated with the divine" (Stark 1999:287). The default interpretive lens is medicalizing: "mystical" states of connection are dissociation, temporal lobe oddities, or psychosis waiting to be diagnosed. Heriot-Maitland (2008) documents the scholarly habit of reading mysticism through the lens of madness, noting that the same experience is lauded as transcendence in one context and treated as symptom in another. As sociologists we may, as most other scientists, "…regard interest in spirituality and religion as a sign of bias or nonobjectivity, if not downright senility" (Hamer 2005:207). If the phenomenon is assumed to be a neurological glitch rather than a social fact, there is nothing sociological to study.

The credibility trap. Third, the study of connection experience triggers a professional hostility that exceeds even the bias Perry documents against religion specialists. Versluis (2007) notes that scholars across disciplines risk censure and belittlement for expressing interest in connection experience. William James "underwent professional censure and ridicule for fervently espousing the authenticity of the spiritual orientation" (Hoffman 2010:408). Abraham Maslow spent years defending peak experiences against skeptical colleagues. I was called, by colleagues, a "space cadet" and "not a serious scholar" for showing interest in connection phenomena. The dynamic is a turbocharged version of the Regnerus Effect Perry identifies: if studying religion makes you suspect, studying *mysticism* makes you a joke. The suspicion is compounded by the "me-search" stigma—the assumption that anyone who studies inner experience must be narrating their own diary rather than doing science (Devendorf et al. 2023).[2] You are not going to pay attention to anything if you think it is a stupid delusion, and you are certainly not going to build a career on a topic that gets you name-called in the corridor.

The epistemological threat. Fourth, connection experience poses a quiet but profound challenge to sociology's epistemological authority. A defining feature of the experience is *noesis*—the conviction that the encounter conveys valid, even capital-T truth and knowledge (Forman 1986; Hood 1975; Stace 1960). The experiencer does not merely feel good; they are not merely healed and transformed; they often feel themselves *informed, enlightened even!* This is awkward

2 Not that narrating your own "diary" is a bad thing. I'm sure we could all learn a lot by reading each other's personal connection diaries, like my own (Sosteric 2022).

for a discipline that claims privileged access to the mechanisms of social knowledge. If ordinary people can access transformative, noetic insight through non-rational means, sociology's monopoly on explaining how humans come to know and change is relativized. It is safer, intellectually, to reduce such reports to emotion, false consciousness, and psychosis than to treat them as data.

Class control: Fifth, as I would argue, connection experience represents a potential threat to the status quo, not only because it can fuel revolutionary consciousness (Harvey 1998; Sosteric 2018b) , but because it is difficult to control. It can lead to not only healing (Hawks 2002; Mahoney and Pargament 2004; Vaillant 2002) but to positive personal (Maslow 2012), meaningful social (Erika Summers-Effler and Hyunjin Deborah Kwak 2015), and progressive, status-quo challenging political transformations (Harvey 1998; Pahnke 1963; Sosteric 2018b, 2020). The 1960s provide the textbook case: psychedelic-fueled connection experience on a mass scale generated precisely the kind of anti-authoritarian, status-quo-challenging fervour that alarmed political and economic elites (Lee and Shlain 1985; Pahnke 1963; Stevens 1988). The accumulating class may see psychedelic-induced connection experience as a threat and may take steps to suppress it. The subsequent "war on drugs" can be read, at least in part, as an accumulating-class project to suppress a channel of unregulated mystical access (Sosteric 2018b). This suppression may even extend into the academy. Elkins (2009) describes the assassination of Humanistic Psychology. Why? Because its models of human nature and psychological therapy were efficiently healing and empowering people. From the perspectives of an accumulating class trying to maintain control of its workforce amidst the psychedelic fuelled connection that occurred during the 1960s, methodologies and knowledge that provided fuel to the fire were bad thing. Capitalists do not want hippies hanging out in a park connecting with things while vocally rejecting the system, they want docile and compliant middle-class children to work obediently in the jobs conveniently provided (Stevens 1988).

These are hypothesis worth considering. Elite organizations have long sought to *co-opt* connection experiences into institutional channels (the Church, "esoteric" brotherhoods, etc.) they provide (Grace 2000; Jantzen 1995). This allows them to control the experiences in

hermetically sealed environments where noetic insight can be diverted toward conservative or commercial ends (Carrette and King 2008) rather than enlightening and liberatory ones.

Connection experiences are not inherently revolutionary, they are inherently *powerful*, and power is always contested.

Paradigm policing. Finally, any attempt to theorize the underlying dynamics of consciousness and connection inevitably breaches materialism's paradigmatic safety zones. Legitimate frameworks like Integrated Information Theory (IIT) are met with dismissive accusations of pseudoscience (Fleming et al. 2023; Oizumi, Albantakis, and Tononi 2014), not because they fail empirically, but because they threaten the ontological comfort of methodological naturalism run amok. Sociology has conflated *methodological* restraint with *ontological* denial, treating anything that cannot be reduced to social structure as either biology or bunk.

Whatever the reasons for the neglect of connection experience, the important takeaway here is simple. Connection experience is a ubiquitous and important human phenomenon. Connection experience is arguably the primary source of religion. Connection experience has significant implications for sociology. As sociologists we need to talk more about religion, that is true; however, we cannot ignore connection experience. Reprioritization and reconfiguration will not be complete unless we include this important and impactful human phenomenon within a wider sociological view.

There's no reason not to. Studying connection experience is not a concession to esoterica or a retreat from rigour. It is a sociological necessity. A sociology of religion that studies institutions while ignoring the experiential spark that generates them is like a sociology of medicine that studies hospitals, insurance regimes, and physician demographics while refusing to examine the experience of illness and healing. It is not wrong, exactly. It is just half the story—and half a story produces bad science.

And if that is not enough to at least tweak interest, several additional reasons can be marshalled.

Scientific integrity demands it. Perry (2023) argues that ignoring religion obscures a tremendous portion of social behaviour and undercuts our efforts to produce accurate knowledge. The same logic applies, with greater force, to the experiential dimension. If religion is among the most powerful forms of social behaviour on the planet, and if connection experience is the bedrock from which religion emerges, then a sociology that can neither account for nor understand that emergence is systematically misidentifying its own object of study. We do not need to adopt a theological ontology to study connection experience any more than we need to adopt a psychiatric ontology to study mental illness. We need only treat it as a social fact: reported, patterned, stratified, and consequential.

Sociologists potentially have a lot to say. Sociological tools appropriately applied can help us better understand the phenomenon and its potential. For example, connection experience is not a uniform, asocial flash that lands identically on every brain. It is filtered through social location. As Bourque (1969) observed, persons with higher socioeconomic status and a more cosmopolitan orientation tend to have experiences triggered by aesthetic phenomena, beauty in nature, art, or music, and are more likely to describe those experiences in secular, psychological, or scientific language. Those with different class positions may encounter the same phenomenological event but interpret it through radically different symbolic registers. These are sociological patterns and interesting by default.

Gender is particularly central aspect of the experience which sociologists, gender specialists, and others connected to the discipline can help illuminate. For example, connection experience has historically been one of the few avenues through which women could claim spiritual authority, yet it has also been one of the primary mechanisms for their discreditation. The same experience lauded as transcendence in a male saint is pathologized as hysteria in a woman. Those who harbour incipient patriarchy (e.g., Stace 1960) impose their gendered assumptions onto the analysis and interpretation of mysticism, reading male experience as revelation and female experience as symptom (Jantzen 1995). Sociology is uniquely positioned to unpack this: to examine how gender shapes not only who is permitted to have a validated connection experience, but whose testimony is believed, whose authority is recognized, and whose

experience is medicated rather than celebrated. Perhaps most important, the "non-peaker" Maslow (2012) described, someone who suppresses or denies peak experience, is not randomly distributed across the population. In a culture that has historically punished women, minorities, and the working class for claiming unmediated access to the transcendent, the sociology of connection experience is inseparable from the sociology of power.

There are consequences that sociology cannot afford to ignore. The consequential dimension of connection experience reads like a syllabus for the discipline. It shapes mental and physical health (Mahoney and Pargament 2004; Vaillant 2002). It transforms personality and identity (Geels 2003). It fuels political engagement *or* withdrawal (Kucinskas and Stewart 2022; Schnabel 2021; Sosteric 2018b). On a mass scale it can generate the kind of anti-authoritarian fervour that reorders the body politic (Lee and Shlain 1985; Stevens 1988). These are not easily dismissed. They are the stuff of sociology, gender and ethnicity, social movements, identity formation, health disparities, political polarization. To cede the study of these consequences to psychology or neuroscience is to abandon our disciplinary claim to explain the social.

Inclusion and public trust. Taking connection experience seriously is an act of disciplinary repair. Perry (2023) shows that perceived professor hostility toward religion undermines public trust, particularly among evangelicals and conservatives. But hostility toward *experience* is felt even more acutely, because it strikes at the epistemic core of religious identity. When sociologists treat a believer's testimony of direct encounter as mere delusion or false consciousness, we are not just disagreeing with their theology; we are dismissing their phenomenology. For religious minorities and students of colour who already perceive the academy as hostile terrain (Scheitle et al. 2021), this dismissal is doubly alienating. A sociology that can study connection experience without pathologizing it is a sociology that earns the trust of the publics it claims to explain.

Noesis and the sociology of knowledge. Finally, connection experience also poses a productive challenge to the sociology of knowledge. A defining feature of the experience is *noesis,* the conviction that the encounter conveys valid, even capital-T True, knowledge (Forman 1986;

Hood 1975; Stace 1960). This is sociologically significant for two reasons. First, it helps explain why religious and spiritual movements can generate such intense commitment: adherents are not simply obeying doctrine; they are acting on what they experience as direct knowledge. Second, and more critically, the content of that noetic insight is itself socially variable. Patriarchy, sexism, elitism, personal trauma, and political orientation all bias what the experiencer "learns" (Sosteric 2017). A connection experience can produce progressive, status-quo-challenging insight (Harvey 1998; Pahnke 1963; Sosteric 2018), or it can be captured, diverted, and domesticated within hermetically sealed elite environments where it reinforces existing hierarchies rather than dissolving them. Understanding how social structure shapes the *content* of allegedly transcendent knowledge is a research program that only sociology is equipped to lead.

Conclusion

Perry (2023) is right: religion does not go away when sociologists ignore it. The politicians, pundits, and grifters will gladly fill the gap, and the discipline will deserve the public distrust that follows. But the argument presented in these pages is that even if sociology answered Perry's call tomorrow, we would still be producing half a science. We would be studying the shell without the spark, the institution without the experience that generates it, the map without the territory.

The two halves are not complementary; they are co-constitutive. Without attention to churches, sects, markets, and movements, the sociology of religion collapses into phenomenological anecdote. But without attention to connection experience, the "mystical" encounter, the peak experience, the noetic moment that James and Maslow recognized as religion's bedrock, the sociology of religion collapses into organizational demography. It becomes a discipline that counts the faithful without understanding what faith feels like, that tracks political alignment without grasping why a single transformative encounter can reorder a life, that documents declining attendance without noticing that the transcendent has not disappeared but has gone underground, into private, hybrid, and commercialized forms.

I have argued that sociology is uniquely equipped to study this experiential half. Our concepts of social stratification, gender, and the sociology of knowledge are not optional add-ons; they are the precise tools needed to explain why connection experiences vary by class, why they are pathologized in women and celebrated in men, why their noetic content is sometimes revolutionary and sometimes domesticated by elite capture. These are not questions for neuroscience or psychology alone. They are sociological questions, and they sit at the intersection of everything the discipline already claims to care about: power, inequality, identity, social movements, and the contested production of meaning.

The barriers to this research are real. They are institutional, psychological, political, and epistemological, and they have proven durable precisely because they reinforce one another. But they are not insurmountable. What is required is the same thing Perry demands for religion generally: a reprioritization. Hire scholars who can work across the church-sect-mysticism typology. Fund research that treats connection experience as a patterned social fact rather than a neurological glitch or a private hobby. Publish it in generalist journals, not solely in subfield ghettoes. And stop treating the study of inner experience as me-search, madness, or marketing.

Sociology has long claimed to be the comprehensive science of social life. That claim is hollow if we continue to ignore one of the most pervasive, consequential, and socially variable experiences available to human beings. Perry calls for a sociology of religion worthy of the name. I add only this: such a sociology must be a sociology of spirituality in full, encompassing both the institution and the experience, both the ecclesiastic shell and the mystical spark. Anything less is not complete. Anything less is a dereliction of the disciplinary duty to explain the social world as it actually is.

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