Introduction: Discovering the Riches of the Word

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> Religious learning involves reading. More than that, it is largely consti-
> tuted by reading [...] Religious reading requires and fosters a particular
> set of attitudes to what is read, as well as reading practices that comport
> well with those attitudes; and it implies an epistemology, a set of views
> about what knowledge is and about the relations between reading and
> the acquisition and retention of knowledge.[1]

With these words, the theologian Paul Griffiths describes the fundamen-
tal relationship between the act of reading and the practice of religion, and
emphasizes the extent to which religious reading is strictly connected to the
development of specific attitudes and relations between the reader and the
religious text, relations that are 'at once attitudinal, cognitive, and moral, and
that therefore imply an ontology, an epistemology, and an ethic'.[2] This pecu-
liarity, which characterizes the intensity of the religious reading experience
and the personal engagement required of the reader, is based on two central
features of the religious reading experience, which are only in apparent con-
tradiction with each other: on the one hand the essential stability of the reli-
gious text, and on the other the ever-continuous and ever-repeated character
of the religious reading act. As Griffiths so poetically puts it, religious texts are
'understood as a stable and vastly rich resource, one that yields meaning, sug-
gestions (or imperatives) for action, matter for aesthetic wonder, and much
else'. They are often considered as 'a treasure-house, an ocean, a mine: the
deeper religious readers dig, the more ardently they fish, the more mindedly
they seek gold, the greater will be their reward'.[3] The religious text has to be
'uncovered, retrieved and opened up' in the conviction that 'what is there to be

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1   Griffiths P.J., *Religious Reading: The Place of Reading in the Practice of Religion* (Oxford:
     1999) 40.
2   Griffiths, *Religious Reading* 41.
3   Griffiths, *Religious Reading* 41. This terminology is for example very often used in prologues
     to medieval and early modern Bible translations, in which the readers are invited to expe-
     rience the salvific message through the direct access to the vernacular texts. For a recent
     overview of medieval vernacular Bible translations and their readers, see Corbellini S. – Van
     Duijn M. – Folkerts S. – Hoogvliet M., "Challenging the Paradigms. Holy Writ and Lay Readers
     in Late Medieval Europe", *Church History and Religious Culture* 93 (2013) 169–186.

read always precedes, exceeds, and in the end supersedes its readers'. As a consequence of the intrinsic power of religious texts, however, the reading process is not limited to a single event or a unique experience. There is no and there cannot be a 'final act of reading in which everything is uncovered, in which the mine of gold has yielded all its treasure or the fish pool has been emptied of fish. Reading, for religious readers, ends only with death, and perhaps not then: it is a continuous, ever-repeated act'.[4]

As will become clear from this short discussion of various aspects of religious reading practices in late medieval and early modern Europe, the continuous process of uncovering and retrieval and the continual search for the riches of the Word in religious texts are far from passive, and they involve the readers in a process that requires specific habits, techniques, attitudes and devices as well as a level of mental and physical engagement that goes far beyond the occasional meeting between the 'world of the reader' and the 'world of the text'.[5] One of the most evident features of this engagement is the stress on the process of 'internalization' of religious texts through a practice that first involves the use of mnemotechnical devices, then the transformation of the text into 'food for the soul' and finally the capability to 'ruminate', to recall the text even in the absence of the material and physical presence of the book. Likewise, religious texts from this period often incite their readers to follow the example of St Cecilia who, having memorized the Gospels, always wore them in her heart as a bundle of myrrh, her body thus becoming a book (see also the article by Ian Johnson in this volume).

The importance of these reading techniques aiming at internalizing reading material is testified to by their relevant position in Hugh of St Victor's (1096–1141) *Didascalicon*, probably the first treatise dedicated to reading and reading techniques. In the third book of the *Didascalicon*, Hugh describes the importance of memory:

> We ought, therefore, in all that we learn, to gather brief and dependable abstracts to be stored in the little chest of memory, so that later on, when need arises, we can derive everything else from them. These one must often turn over in the mind and regurgitate from the stomach of one's memory to taste them, lest by long inattention to them, they disappear.

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4   Griffiths, *Religious Reading* 41.

5   The terms 'world of the reader' and 'world of the text' have been used by Paul Ricoeur in the third volume of his work *Temps et récit* (*Le temps raconté*). The terms are cited by Cavallo G. – Chartier R., "Introduction", in Cavallo G. – Chartier R. (eds.), *A History of Reading in the West* (Cambridge: 1999) 1–36, here 2.

> I charge you, then, my student, not to rejoice a great deal because you may have read many things, but because you have been able to retain them. Otherwise there is no profit in having read or understood much.[6]

This process of 'mastication of the word', an intensive and slow reading style, contributes to the assimilation of the content of religious works and to transform the reading text into 'lecturature', an activity that 'is typically not passive, not done with the principal goal of amassing information […]. It is done, instead, for the purpose of altering the course of the readers' cognitive, affective, and active lives by the ingestion, digestion, rumination, and restatement of what has been read'.[7] Far from being merely a characteristic of historical periods characterized by a scarcity of books, such as early medieval Europe, religious reading is a particularly intensive, physical and emotional approach to textuality that has the power to transform a daily activity into a spiritual experience. It engages the readers, moreover, in a process of self-fashioning and moral transformation, which accompanies them during their private and public lives.

The description of religious reading as a daily activity in which large strata of the late medieval and early modern population were engaged might sound strange in the light of traditional views that emphasize the inaccessibility of (religious) texts, in particular for lay readers. However, recent scholarship has stressed the relevance and impact of literacy in medieval towns as well as the massive presence of religious literature in the urban landscape, and the varied possibilities for large groups of readers to approach religious textuality.[8] The accessibility of religious texts, the impact of religious readership and the investigation of the diverse modes of religious readership in late medieval and early modern Europe are at the very heart of the contributions to this volume, which attempts at crossing disciplinary and chronological boundaries to present a wide-ranging overview of approaches to the study of religious readership

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6 The text is cited from the English translation by Taylor J., *The Didascalicon of Hugh of St. Victor: A Medieval Guide to the Arts* (New York – London: 1961) 94. On Hugh of St Victor and his reading techniques, see also Hamesse J., "The Scholastic Model of Reading", in Cavallo G. – Chartier R. (eds.), *A History of Reading in the West* (Cambridge: 1999) 102–119.

7 Griffiths, *Religious Reading* 55; Hamesse "The Scholastic Model of Reading" 104. The term 'lecturature' has been coined by Dagenais J., *The Ethics of Reading in Manuscript Culture: Glossing the Libro de Buen Amor* (Princeton: 1994) 24.

8 Mostert M. – Adamska A. (eds.), *Uses of the Written Word in Medieval Towns*, Medieval Urban Literacy II (Turnhout: 2014); Corbellini S. (ed.), *Cultures of Religious Reading in the Late Middle Ages: Instructing the Soul, Feeding the Spirit, and Awakening the Passion* (Turnhout: 2013).

in the period from the fourteenth to the seventeenth century and over a broad geographical area, from England to the Italian Peninsula. They thus challenge the traditional paradigms that distinguish between late medieval religious traditions and early modern Protestant and Catholic Reformation innovations, between Northern and Southern Europe, between exclusion from and participation in religious readership and between the scarcities of diffusion in the manuscript era and its abundance after the 'printing revolution'.[9]

The long period covered by this book—from the fourteenth to the seventeenth century—might seem surprising, because the contents apparently neglect developments that are generally perceived as irreversible turning points in history and, most importantly for this book, as marking profound changes in religious reading practices: the Protestant Reformation and the reactions of the Roman Catholic Church. Taken together, the contributions to this book make clear that in spite of the deep confessional divide, numerous similar reading practices continued to exist among medieval and early modern readers, as well as among Catholics and Protestants, and that the latter two groups in certain cases even shared the same religious texts.

It is still necessary to argue that religious reading during the period from the fourteenth to the seventeenth century should also be described in terms of continuity, because according to commonly accepted historical knowledge Protestantism, in opposition to the Roman Catholic Church, would have required that laypeople learn to read the Bible, thus enabling for the first time in history the emergence of religious reading practices among the laity. For instance, as recently as 2007, Sascha Becker and Ludger Wößman published a re-evaluation of Max Weber's thesis concerning the relation between Protestant ethics and the emergence of capitalism. They argued that differences in wealth between Protestants and Catholics in nineteenth-century Prussia can be explained by differences in schooling, because Luther 'explicitly favoured the advancement of universal schooling, for the simple reason that people had to be literate in order to be able to read God's Word, the Bible', and that 'Protestants acquired more schooling than Catholics for religious reasons'.[10]

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9   The contributions to this volume are the results of two scientific meetings organized in the years 2011 in Leeds, UK (International Medieval Congress) and 2012 in Groningen, NL. The scientific meetings have been organized as part of the activities of the ERC-Starting Grant research project "Holy Writ and Lay Readers. A Social History of Vernacular Bible Translations in the Late Middle Ages", funded by the European Research Council (2008–2013).

10   Becker S.O. – Wößmann L., "Was Weber Wrong? A Human Capital Theory of Protestant Economic History", *Munich Discussion Paper* 2007–7; online http://epub.ub.uni-muenchen.de/1366/1–59, here 8, 10.

While it is true that Christianity has an intrinsic tension between the Evangelical call 'to spread the Word' (as in *Mark* 15:15–16) and the necessity to protect the *inscrutabilia Dei* from unqualified readers who might come up with unorthodox interpretations, this does not mark a simple dichotomy between the categories 'Protestant' and 'Catholic'. On the contrary, this tension applies to both the Middle Ages and the early modern period, and to Protestants and Catholics alike.[11] Several contributions in this book show that evangelization and religious instruction were taken very seriously during the Middle Ages and that even the illiterate, the very poor and children can be identified as readers targeted by these texts.

The reconstruction of this essential process is approached from several angles, using sources from a broad European area, and it is reconstructed through the use of various methodologies. Through a materialist philological approach to manuscript MS Harley 6333, Matti Peikola shows how the paratextual apparatus of the English vernacular Gospel harmony *Oon of Foure*, copied together with Biblical books in the Later Version of the Wycliffite translation, reveals a concern to communicate the weekly Gospel readings during Sunday's Mass as faithfully as possible to laypeople, even if the original was in fact not suited for this goal. The scribe, whose work testifies to an active engagement with the biblical text, has added lists of liturgical Pericopes, adapted to the specific wording of *Oon of Foure*, together with reading instructions most likely with a lay audience in mind, so that the reader could read the Pericopes 'as [they are read] in the Church'.

In her essay Elisabeth Salter explores popular reading practices and experiences through an innovative use of anthropological approaches. Departing from a case study of two different English rhyming versions of the Ten Commandments in Lambeth Palace Library MS 853, she shows how acculturation may occur through familiarity with a text. The same two poems also serve as the basis for a reader-centred approach that 'explores the possibility that a text such as the Ten Commandments as found in rhyme in Lambeth MS 853 might be open to, or stimulate, a range of interpretations that include potentially heretical understandings'.

Close reading of medieval book lists and inventories, in combination with prologues and reading instructions, confirms that lay men and women did actually have access to the vernacular Bibles and religious treatises, as is demonstrated in the contributions by Suzan Folkerts (focusing on the Netherlands) and Sabrina Corbellini (based on Italian sources). In her contribution Suzan Folkerts discusses methodological issues of approaches to lay Bible reading

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11   See also the contributions to Lutton R. – Salter E. (eds.), *Pieties in Transition: Religious Practices and Experiences, c. 1400–1640* (Aldershot: 2005).

during the later Middle Ages in the Low Countries, for which she proposes a complementary approach, combining evidence from medieval book lists with codicological and textual sources. This enables her to demonstrate that the vernacular Bible was available to laypeople in the Low Countries and that lay reading of Sacred Scripture was actually encouraged.

The contribution by Sabrina Corbellini shows, moreover, to what extent the reading of religious texts can be connected to the formation of late medieval mentalities and to the creation of professional ethics, even outside the strict application in the development of a specific lay religiosity. Although this process is most clearly visible in the late Middle Ages, this 'ethical reading' of the sacred texts in lay writing can be traced back at least to the early thirteenth century, when non-professional users of the Holy Writ, such as the *causidicus* Albertanus of Brescia, authored treatises in which they re-interpreted biblical pericopes in lay and practical perspective.[12]

The early start of this process is confirmed by Margriet Hoogvliet's contribution. She demonstrates how catechetical texts in French addressing laypeople circulated as early as the thirteenth century. Moreover, she stresses the growing impact of these texts, as the numbers of copies of religious texts in French in the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries must have been particularly high. These texts often contain explicit instructions to laypeople for frequent re-reading and for memorizing, but also for collective reading sessions in order to share religious knowledge with other laypeople.

On the other hand, there is ample evidence that even after the Council of Trent the Roman Catholic Church continued to take religious instruction of the laity very seriously. Likewise, religious reading was an important practice of the Catholic laity during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries that was warmly encouraged. The religious texts laypeople had at their disposal were often medieval works in a linguistically updated form, or recently written works. Certain texts were even shared by both confessions, the Bible and Thomas à Kempis's *Imitatio Christi* being the two most important examples. This continuity of reading practices, from orthodox to dissenting audiences, from the Middle Ages to the early modern period, is addressed by Elisabeth Salter in her article.

In his contribution, Wim François demonstrates how in the sixteenth century, although ecclesiastical officials pleaded for measures to be taken,

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12   For a discussion of the connection between biblical reading and ethical values, see Corbellini, S., "Looking in the Mirror of the Scriptures. Reading the Bible in medieval Italy", in François W. – Den Hollander A. (eds.), *"Wading Lambs and Swimming Elephants": The Bible for the Laity and Theologians in the Late Medieval and Early Modern Era* (Louvain: 2012) 21–40.

Catholic authorities in the Low Countries did not ban the printing and reading of vernacular Bibles. As long as translations followed the Vulgate and their reading and interpretation remained connected and subordinate to the liturgy, preaching and teaching of the Church, ordinary believers could freely use a vernacular Bible. However, Church officials, not in the least theologians from the University of Leuven, remained concerned about laymen transgressing the aforementioned limits. Therefore, they sought to censure popular and influential authors like Erasmus—who openly pleaded for vernacular Bible reading—and instead promoted the comprehensive and unequivocal prohibition of the vernacular Bible. Although the Index of Trent of 1564 eventually forbade vernacular Bible reading and vernacular Bible printing came to a halt after the Iconoclastic Fury two years later (in the southern, Catholic, Low Countries at least), New Testaments kept being printed—and obviously read. Religious reading could even be considered as a medicine for laypeople against the 'pestilent' teachings of the Protestants, as Margriet Hoogvliet concludes from the study of several little known sixteenth-century religious texts in French.

The continuous attention to the translation and distribution of religious texts—the Psalms in particular—in the sixteenth century is demonstrated and investigated by Élise Boillet in her contribution. Through a detailed analysis of paratextual elements, in particular page titles and prologues in printed Psalm translations in a period ranging from the second half of the fifteenth to the end of the sixteenth century, Boillet describes how authors of Italian printed texts in the sixteenth century wished to enable the readers to grasp the richness and the depth of the biblical text rather than remaining on the surface and gaining a mere superficial knowledge of it. In this process two seminal transformations are acknowledged: in first instance, the will of the translators to extend the readership of the Psalms from a 'specific' to an 'universal' readership, and secondly the growing attention of authors, editors and printers to the 'new needs in terms of religious knowledge' (such as a stress on the truth of sources and doctrine) and of linguistic and literary qualities (in particular on the choice of an up-to-date vernacular).

As already stated, catechisms and catechetical literature in general represented another favourite genre of religious reading. Authors on both sides of the religious divide suggested and implemented diverse means to lure their—mostly adolescent—readers into reading these books. In his contribution Hubert Meeus demonstrates how such means aimed to stimulate not just independent reading, but also 'reading aloud, rereading, memorization, recitation and discussion'. He provides us with some fascinating examples from 'Jesuit-made' materials printed in Counter-Reformation Antwerp. Apart from detailed reading instructions, authors used a plethora of compositional and editorial devices to win the hearts and minds of their readership: question-and-

answer formats, songs, illustrations, emblems, even cut-out wheels of fortune. Some even chose titles that were slight variations of names of ethically loathsome but popular books to attract juvenile readers' attention. Judging from the many printed collections, songs were considered very effective. So-called *contrafacta* had the additional advantage of counteracting the bad influence of the immoral worldly songs from which some of their melodies were taken.

The increased output of printed texts from the 1470s onwards did not put an end to the relevance of medieval texts, quite the opposite.[13] Éléonore Fournié shows in her article that the printed versions of the medieval *Bible historiale* continued to find audiences well into the seventeenth century. In taking such a 'long term perspective', slight changes and transformations can, however, be detected in readers' responses to this 'old' translation (the text is described as a 'manifestly medieval work'). Owners in the sixteenth century were mostly lay and male, and the information they added was particularly unspecific. As the author notes, 'the *Bible Historiale* is a work situated "in-between": not precious enough for being the object of sumptuous dedications, but sufficiently important to be personalized'. Inscriptions tend to become longer and more articulated in the seventeenth century, and they reveal a growing interest from the clerical side (both individuals and institutions), as well as from female religious. Next to possibilities for the reconstruction of ownership patterns, the research results show evidence of an active use of the text, often within the framework of the performance of religious activities by individuals and groups, lay and religious alike. The printed *Bible historiale* was 'a heritage Bible, a family Bible, a Bible of laypeople and clerics'.

The evidence of the massive circulation of medieval religious literature itself can even be studied in order to better understand sixteenth-century transformations, as Federico Zuliani demonstrates. His contribution centres on the question of the relative failure of Calvin's appeal to the Reformed and the philo-Reformed (the so-called Nicodemites) in Italy to change their way of life. The reason could be found in the analysis of sources at the disposal of Italian readers, in which Nicodemus is presented as 'a very positive example of a true

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13   This is a hotly debated subject and the literature is still burgeoning. One of the most relevant publications for the present book is: D'Avray D.L., "Printing, Mass Communication, and Religious Reformation: The Middle Ages and After", in Crick J.C. – Walsham A. (eds.), *The Uses of Script and Print, 1300–1700* (Cambridge: 2004) 50–70. More generally, see also: Pleij H., "Printing as a Long Term Revolution", in Wijsman H. (ed.), *Books in Transition at the Time of Philip the Fair. Manuscripts and Printed Books in the Late Fifteenth and Early Sixteenth Century Low Countries* (Turnhout: 2009) 287–307; Pettegree A., *The Book in the Renaissance* (New Haven: 2010).

believer in Christ'. As the author stresses, these texts 'may have given a positive rather than a negative idea to those who took, or were accused of having taken, him as a role-model'. These medieval sources, which were widely available in sixteenth-century Italy and still formed the backbone of theological formation at Italian universities, propagated a positive image of Nicodemo, whose spiritual growth is stressed, for example, by Nicholas of Lyra and Anselm of Laon, as well as in a later phase by Tommaso de Vio and Erasmus. This positive interpretation, interestingly enough, did not change in philo-Reformed works, such as those by Ochino and Brucioli.

The *Meditationes vitae Christi* (early fourteenth century) is counted among the most widespread texts throughout Western Europe with a remarkably long-lasting relevance. Ian Johnson addresses three vernacular English versions—the first being Nicholas Love's *Mirror of the Blessed Life of Jesus Christ* (c. 1410)—spanning the early fifteenth to the seventeenth century and testifying to the continuing relevance of this text for devotional practices. The changing paratexts, meanwhile, reflect the transforming religious and political contexts that its Roman Catholic readers had to face. Specific changes in attitude that can be detected from the preface of the 1606 Douai version include an emphasis on Christ as a primarily moral example for the reader, replacing the centrality of Christ incarnate in Love's original text. Another new element is the increased distance perceived between lay readers and readers with an advanced religious knowledge. The prefatory epistle of John Heigham's 1622 revision of Love's original borrows ideas from Jesuit learning, and in the new context of exile and marginalization the author uses terms of protection and hospitality in order to advertise the merits of his work.

Even if the idea of a distinctive disruption separating the Middle Ages from the early modern period was challenged as early as 1927 by Charles Homer Haskins—who argued that the innovations in philology, philosophy, natural sciences and theology actually started with the renaissance of the twelfth century—the debate is still on-going and has even regained prominence during recent years.[14] Jacques Le Goff has very recently renewed his argument in favour of historical continuity, and proposes to define the Middle Ages as

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14   Haskins C.H., *The Renaissance of the Twelfth Century* (Cambridge, MA: 1927). Jack Goody and Peter Burke have challenged traditional Burckhardtian representations of the Italian Renaissance in favour of an inclusive European and even global approach: Goody J., *Renaissances: the one or the many?* (Cambridge: 2010); Burke P., *The European Renaissance: Centres and Peripheries* (Oxford: 1998). See also the contributions to: Lee A. – Péporté K. (eds.), *Renaissance? Perceptions of continuity and discontinuity in Europe, c. 1300–c. 1550* (Leiden: 2010).

a long period continuing well into the eighteenth century.[15] The idea of historical continuity from the twelfth century even until the present day is also central to the arguments of Constantin Fasolt, who has stressed how important it is for modern European societies to acknowledge that their identities are rooted in innovations and developments that originate in the twelfth century.[16] The centrality of historical continuity is also an important support for the relevance of the contributions to this book: they do not address irrational reading practices from a remote past, but issues of continuity, exchange and inclusion, which still resound in our own times. Likewise, in an inspiring essay, Paul Zumthor has suggested that modern readers who read texts from the past and make them accessible to others become participants in the reception of the texts concerned as well, and that the modern engagement with texts from the past reflects modern rather than historical identities.[17]

Religious readership by all means implied active readership, not only in the sense of believers (religious as well as lay) collecting, buying, borrowing, copying and excerpting texts, but also in the sense of reading them in a performative manner. The kind of habits, techniques, attitudes and devices referred to above, as well as the mental and physical engagement involved in reading religious texts, amounted to a primarily bodily experience that went much further than the purely intellectual or cerebral process we normally think of when talking about reading. In a particular sense even illiterate persons could 'read', through perceiving and interpreting illustrations or by being prompted by rubrics and incipits they recognized to remember and recite, tacitly or vocally, the complete versions of formulaic texts they had learned by heart through oral transmission, like prayers. Songs had that effect, too, as we can gauge from the contribution by Hubert Meeus.

There is every reason, therefore, to expand the scope of religious reading, by literate and illiterate alike, to dealings with books that do not even involve the looking at and understanding of word sequences written or printed on parchment or paper. Whereas most text-oriented research is geared towards traditional hermeneutics in the sense of establishing a coherent explanation on a meaning-level—virtually ignoring historical readers and their dealings

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15   Le Goff J., *Faut-il vraiment découper l'histoire en tranches?* (Paris: 2014). See also: Summit J. – Wallace D., "Rethinking Periodization", *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 37/3 (2007) 447–451.

16   Fasolt C., "Hegel's Ghost: Europe, the Reformation, and the Middle Ages", *Viator* 39 (2008) 345–386. See also Raedts P.G.J.M., *De ontdekking van de Middeleeuwen: Geschiedenis van een illusie* (Amsterdam: 2011).

17   Zumthor P., *Performance, réception, lecture* (Longueuil, Québec: 1990) 99–120.

with the text—performance-oriented research seeks to analyse how texts involved their readers and stimulated in them a number of responses during and after the act of reading.[18] They responded to what they read, to the extent that they mentally re-lived or re-experienced what was described in the text or, in the case of dialogic or dramatic discourse, assumed the role of one of the interlocutors and thus co-acted in the dialogue and action. Images, either created in words (through description) or in lines and colors (through miniatures or woodcuts), stimulated their imagination and memory.

This (re)enactment of text and image took place predominantly on a mental level, but could affect their bodily functions as well, leading to emotional responses, as well as to imitative behavior, thus creating habits of both mind and body.[19] Given the importance of the various circumstances (mindset, background, time, location, position) under which reading took place—circumstances sometimes explicitly described or alluded to—both the textual tradition (manuscript or print; one-text or miscellany) and context of use (individual, familial, social) of these texts have to be taken into account. Books can demonstrate a number of features as regards content, style, narrative, and spatial organization that invited users to read them performatively, that is, to mentally and/or bodily (re)enact them.[20] Through their performativity these genres and modes—prime examples are allegories and dialogues—increased especially laypeople's access to areas of knowledge, both intellectual and practical, and enhanced their ability to achieve a higher level of religious acculturation. Recent studies have reconstructed readers' responses to a combination of text and image, in combination with rubrics and layout.[21] Such analyses

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18   Johnson W.A., "Toward a Sociology of Reading in Classical Antiquity", *American Journal of Philology* 121 (2000) 593–627; Morris D.B., "Reading is Always Biocultural", *New Literary History* 37 (2006) 539–561.

19   Dinzelbacher P., "Über die Körperlichkeit in der mittelalterlichen Frömmigkeit", in: Dinzelbacher P., *Körper und Frömmigkeit in der mittelalterlichen Mentalitätsgeschichte* (Paderborn: 2007) 11–49; Stevenson J., *Performance, Cognitive Theory, and Devotional Culture: Sensual Piety in Late Medieval York* (New York: 2010).

20   Jardine L. – Grafton A., "'Studied for Action': How Gabriel Harvey Read His Livy", *Past & Present* 129 (1990) 30–78; Schechner R., *Performance Studies: An Introduction* (New York – London: 2006); Fischer-Lichte E., *The Transformative Power of Performance: A New Aesthetics* (London – New York: 2008); Gertsman E. (ed.), *Visualizing Medieval Performance: Perspectives, Histories, Contexts* (Aldershot: 2008); Sutherland A., "Performing the Penitential Psalms in the Middle Ages", in Gargnolati M. – Suerbaum A. (eds.), *Aspects of the Performative in Medieval Culture* (Berlin – New York: 2010) 15–37.

21   McGrady D., *Controlling Readers: Guillaume de Machaut and His Late Medieval Audience* (Toronto: 2006); Brantley J., *Reading in the Wilderness: Private Devotion and Public*

may be supported by traces of use, user notes, contextual evidence concerning book ownership and use, as well as insights drawn from four areas that informed and conditioned performative reading: the visual arts, preaching, theater and rhetoric.[22]

In his contribution Bart Ramakers discusses three closely related forms of reading competence involving performativity: 'performative literacy', 'performative reading' and 'performance literacy'. He illustrates these with the help of two so-called table plays by Cornelis Everaert, a sixteenth-century playwright from Bruges. They demonstrate Everaert's performative literacy, in the sense that they were informed by his reading experience of devotional treatises and by his ability to visualize this experience through writing, in this case through the composition of these two plays. Furthermore, these treatises—prayer books on the rosary and on the seven blood-sheddings of Christ—called for a performative reading, inviting their users to mentally reenact the Passion. Finally, the plays stimulated the audience's performance literacy; that is, they demonstrated how to encounter and deal with an object's material actuality, through showing how to handle and use particular objects, which were gifts that were presented to the regaled officials in whose honour the plays were performed. Thus, drama in general and Everaert's table plays in particular, provide important clues not just on the subject matter of popular religious reading, but also on its methods and effects.

As already stated, reading could involve more than text alone and in a sense stood open to the illiterate as well. It brings us to the subject of looking at pictures as a viable alternative to reading books, or indeed to the former as a form of reading, especially in the fields of religion and devotion. In her contribution Lucy Wooding explores the extent of, and responses to, such reading of images in Tudor England, thus testing the idea that the Reformation replaced images with words. Again it turns out that particular genres and reading habits continued beyond the religious divide, albeit in altered form, and that critical evaluations of image use were being formulated before and after—by orthodox and

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Performance in Late Medieval England (Chicago – London: 2007); Kramer B., *Een leken-boek in woord en beeld. De Spegel der minschliken zalicheid* (Hilversum: 2013).

22   Amsler M., *Affective Literacies: Writing and Multilingualism in the Late Middle Ages* (Turnhout: 2011); Kienzle B.M., "Medieval Sermons and their Performance: Theory and Record", in Muessig C. (ed.), *Preacher, Sermon and Audience in the Middle Ages* (Leiden – Boston: 2002) 89–124; Berardini V., "Discovering Performance Indicators in Late Medieval Sermons", *Medieval Sermon Studies* 54 (2010) 75–86; Otter M., "Vultus adest (the face helps). Performance, expressivity and interiority", in Carruthers M. (ed.), *Rhetoric beyond Words: Delight and Persuasion in the Arts of the Middle Ages* (Cambridge: 2010) 151–172.

reformists alike. Reading images, treating them as texts that referred to, or were about, the religious or devotional content depicted, prevented believers from identifying them with that content, thus avoiding idolatry. A combined reading of texts and images was an even better way to reach this goal—images that by the way could be material but also mental or spiritual, called for or evoked by texts. Wooding demonstrates this with examples from the veneration of the Passion, and the crucifixion in particular, Passion narratives, sermons and especially poetry kept on stimulating their readers' or listeners' imaginations, even after the Reformation. In Wooding' words: 'The crucifixion was still, therefore, something which required the eye of the beholder'.

As several contributions in the volume demonstrate (e.g. Corbellini, Hoogvliet, Peikola), religious material was not only made accessible to the readers, but the same readers were instructed on how to approach religious texts in order to fully enjoy the process of uncovering and discovering the riches of the Word. Through paratextual elements, such as glosses and prologues, the readers were coached towards a growing self-awareness of their own religious potential and of their possibilities for participating in the religious experience and performance (Ramakers, Johnson, Peikola). Moreover, they were challenged to develop their own interpretation (with a stress on the social, ethical and moral content of religious reading) and to transform themselves into agents in the dissemination of religious knowledge. One of the most important manifestations of the agency of religious readers is the application of principles of selective readership, which implies the use of navigation tools and the active selection of reading materials. As Griffiths so eloquently states, 'religious readers are in search of flowers. They find them, naturally enough, in the works they read, the gardens they work: these gardens are full of fragrant blooms to be culled, carefully pruned, and rearranged into new bouquets'.[23] This continuous search for texts, interpretations and combination and re-combination of religious texts demonstrates to what extent religious reading, an activity that is traditionally linked to authoritative and normative institutions and their efforts of 'encapsulating' textualities within a well-defined set of norms, could somehow grant to the readers space for personal and private experiences and performances.

The possibility for religious readers to be granted space in the construction of their identities does not, however, imply that religious reading finds its unique fulfilment in solitude and isolation. On the contrary, real and

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23   Griffiths, *Religious Reading* 97. The circulation of religious works with titles such *Garden of Oration* (e.g. in the contribution by Corbellini) enhance the importance of this metaphor for the description of religious readership.

imagined textual communities contributed to the increase of religious literacy and its practice, to the provision of reading material and to creation of networks for the distribution and exchange of religious texts.[24] Although the contributions in this volume stress the importance of these shared practices in Western Europe, the relevance of communal reading activities in the transmission of (religious) knowledge cannot be overestimated. In the study of ancient literacies, as well as in the exploration of the social and cultural history of reading practices in medieval Arabic lands, the opening of research perspectives taking into consideration groups and networks instead of mere individual readers offers a new and richer picture of how knowledge could be transmitted and assimilated.[25]

In conclusion, the contributions in this volume are a first attempt at studying religious reading in a long-term perspective, covering the period from the thirteenth to the seventeenth century, with a specific focus on the fifteenth and the sixteenth century. The choice for these 'long fifteenth and sixteenth centuries', a period of profound transformation on a social, cultural and foremost religious level, and the stress on continuities and endurances is not intended to erase divides and boundaries, but rather to reassess evidence and sources in order to hopefully present a new and well-balanced evaluation of the relevance of religious reading for the study of late medieval and early modern cultures.

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24   Scase W., "Reading Communities", in Treharne E. – Walker G., *The Oxford Handbook of Medieval Literature in English* (Oxford: 2010) 557–573; Hoogvliet M. *"Pour faire laies personnes entendre les hystoires des escriptures anciennes*. Theoretical Approaches to a Social History of Religious Reading in the French Vernaculars During the Late Middle Ages", in Corbellini, *Cultures of Religious Reading* 261–267.

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